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A POINT OF HONOR; OR, DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

BY LILLIAN LOVEJOY,

AUTHOR OF "SINNED AGAINST," "HONOR BOUND," "A STRANGE MARRIAGE," ETC., ETC.

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THE TWO GIRLS WERE NORA STANDISH AND HER SISTER ADA.

A Point of Honor;

OR,
DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

BY LILLIAN LOVEJOY,
AUTHOR OF "TEMPTED THROUGH LOVE,"
"BUYING A HEART," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. RASH WORDS.

"AND I tell you, sir, that not one cent of my money shall ever go to pay your disgraceful debts! I wonder you are not ashamed to look me in the face and suggest such a thing to me, when times are so bad! You know I can't get in half the rents, and the whole country is going to the mischief. You have no decency, sir!"

"I am very sorry to have to ask it. I should not have been obliged to do so if my aunt Henderson had not treated me so shamefully. No one could count upon her cutting me off at the last, after she had always led me to suppose I should be her heir. I should not have lived up to what I did, or owe a penny now, only for her abominable treatment of me. She has regularly swindled me, the old skinflint!"

"Don't dare to speak of my sister as an old skinflint, sir—a most sensible, just woman, who saw the sort of fellow you were, and was too wise to leave her husband's hard-earned money to be squandered by a worthless spendthrift!"

"Spendthrift, indeed! I wonder when I ever had the chance of being a spendthrift! I have been kept a precious sight too tight for that."

"What do you mean by 'too tight,' you ungrateful scamp? Haven't I allowed you a thousand a year ever since you became of age?—a sum more than many a respectable man has to support a large family upon! What have you to show for it? I ought to have put you into your uncle's banking-house; let you try to make some money, instead of squandering my small income to keep up a set of idle, good-for-nothing, smoking, betting, drinking scamps. What do the whole lot of you do from morning till night but idle and dissipate, dressing yourselves up like fops, and dangling after a lot of women as silly and beggarly as yourselves? What are you scowling at sir?"

"I think, my dear governor, we had better postpone this conversation until you can enter upon it with some degree of calmness and reason. I find it hard to believe that it is Mr. Loftus Tracy who is speaking. The sentiments and manner would better become some of that codfish aristocracy your sisters did us the honor to bring into the family."

"And deuced lucky they were to get the same codfish aristocracy, I can tell you. The fellows were so pleased to enter a family like ours that they never asked for a penny with your aunts; and the property was not drained to give them fortunes, as it should have been had they married into any of the beggarly high-toned families you affect. Little as you'll have, my fine fellow, when I am gone, it would have been a precious deal less if my sisters hadn't been so well taken off my hands."

Mr. Loftus Tracy was a wealthy irate old real estate broker, and the above amiable interchange of civilities took place between him and his son and heir, Gerald, one fine summer morning in the beautiful grounds of his country residence.

A lovelier spot never charmed the eye of man; dark mountains rose boldly round the handsome dwelling, and the richly wooded lawn sloped down to the sides of a beautiful lake, dotted with pretty little islands.

Everything that art or nature could do to beautify a place had been done for Tracy Park.

The walks and gardens were in perfect order and all appertaining to the establishment well ordered and comfortable.

Through the Tracy family ran a considerable vein of shrewdness.

It had led the ladies to choose their husbands from among the rich manufacturers, and sent the second brother to make a large fortune sheep-farming in Australia, instead of enduring genteel poverty at home, while Loftus, the eldest of the family had by his energy and prudent investments amassed a no inconsiderable fortune, which was steadily increasing as the years rolled on.

Loftus was decidedly fond of money, and no one could be guilty of a greater offense in his eyes than to ask him to part with any of it.

Gerald Tracy, unfortunately, had not inherited his father's prudence. Money and he soon parted company. He was easy-going, good-natured, and extravagant; and, without being either vicious or very fast, had managed to involve himself pretty deeply in debt.

From his earliest years his father had taken pains to impress upon him that his real estate was hopelessly mortgaged, the income derived from it miserable, and that he had the greatest difficulty in trying to make both ends meet.

Of late years Gerald had become very skeptical on this subject. He had heard a very different version from others, and made as many inquiries as he could on his own account; but his father kept his affairs too close for any one to know exactly how they stood.

Gerald had really been treated very unfairly by his aunt, Mrs. Henderson, as she had led him and every one else to suppose he was her heir.

Acting on this supposition, Gerald Tracy had lived considerably beyond his allowance; and now that his hopes in that quarter were dashed to the ground, he had been forced to confess his shortcomings to his father, and ask for money to pay his creditors.

The effect of this demand on Loftus was like putting a match to a barrel of gunpowder. He raved, and stamped, and shouted, and declared he was ruined himself and on the verge of bankruptcy. He cursed his son's folly and wickedness, and solemnly declared that if five dollars would keep him out of prison he would not give it to him.

Gerald was very angry at the abuse heaped on him by his father, and had great difficulty in keeping any sort of command over his temper; but he knew that, like most violently passionate men, Loftus's bark was worse than his bite; and he hoped that, after having given vent to his wrath, he would come round and help him out of his difficulties.

But in this instance Mr. Tracy was perfectly fixed in his determination not to pay his son's debts. Indeed, he was rather pleased than otherwise at finding him in such a scrape, as he considered it would render him more amenable to the plans he and his mother had formed regarding him.

Gerald was now twenty-six, and as fine and handsome a young fellow as any one would wish to see. His only faults were extravagance and a little wildness. A good wife would cure him of these little failings and keep him straight. A most desirable lady in every respect had been found for him, and it only remained for him to settle down and marry her at once.

But both Mr. and Mrs. Tracy knew very well that it would not be such a very easy matter to get Gerald to act as he ought in this affair.

He had flirted with every girl in his set, and come through the ordeal heart-whole; though from one, as he laughingly acknowledged, he had only escaped "by the skin of his teeth."

He openly expressed his contempt for his fellow-men who had put their necks under the matrimonial yoke, and declared his determination to enjoy his own freedom for many a long year to come.

This was all very well as long as he was independent and expected to fall in for his aunt's large fortune; but things were changed now.

His expectations from that quarter were at

an end; his creditors were pressing him, and he had been driven to apply to his father as a last resource to save him from ruin.

Under these circumstances he might be more tractable, and be ready to listen to him.

When his father refused to help him in any way he would be driven into a corner, and be glad to extricate himself by the only means which presented itself to him.

"I think, with property worth twenty-five thousand a year, you might afford to help your eldest son a little more," remarked Gerald, angrily, after a pause.

"Twenty-five thousand a year, you fool! Not twenty-five hundred. What is the good of a lot of farms, and real estate that don't pay enough to cover its taxes. You know very well it is as much as ever I can do to make both ends meet at the best of times; now it is sheer starvation, and then there is Burke's charge on this property for five thousand dollars. If the breath was out of me tomorrow, and you stepped into my shoes—as I have no doubt you are longing to do—a nice start you'd make with that mortgage, your own debts, and the support of your mother and the children. Faith, if I were you, I'd cut the whole thing, and be off to Australia or Texas, and make a livelihood, as your uncle did before you."

"I can hardly believe things are in such a mess. I never saw any signs of poverty about, and you have the name of being very snugly off."

"And you have the name of being an egregious fool, sir, and an extravagant, good-for-nothing fop! Talk to me about things being in a mess, indeed! A fellow who has made such a pretty hash of his own affairs. Thanks to the good management and self-denial of your mother and myself, there are no visible signs of want in our establishment; but your unprincipled extravagance will bring on the crash we have staved off for a little. How much do you owe, sir, to the fools who were so green as to give you credit?"

"I am sorry to say I am in debt for four thousand dollars."

Loftus received this announcement with a hollow groan, and started back as if he had been shot; but, happening to come against the trunk of a tree, he received a shock which restored his equilibrium.

"Oh, this is worse than anything I could have imagined!" he groaned. "It will kill your poor mother! I thought you might have been a little wild and foolish—owed five hundred, perhaps—but four thousand! You have gone to perdition entirely! You must have plunged into every species of vice and depravity! You have sunk to the lowest depths of infamy!"

"You have no right whatever to make such assertions about me!" cried Gerald, goaded to passion. "I have done nothing infamous or depraved, neither have I disgraced you or myself in any way. Counting on my aunt's money, I lived beyond my allowance. Had she not misled me, I should not have bought my yacht or so many horses. However, you need not trouble yourself about it; I will clear out and rid you of me entirely."

"Clear out! May I ask what is to become of you after that? You are no use for anything; and if you think I am going to keep you loafing about idly somewhere else at my expense, you are greatly mistaken."

"It is not very likely, as long as I am in my senses, that I shall bury myself alive, or indulge in the exciting pastime of 'loafing about,' as you call it. You have suggested Australia. I shall go there, or to some other country. The world is large, and the further away I can get, the better I shall be pleased."

"Of course you will, you unnatural scamp! You never had a spark of affection for your home or family, or the slightest instinct of a gentlemanly spirit. You might be a leading man some day. You belong to an old family, and will have as nice a property as there is in the State; but you throw away all your

chances, and prefer being a cowboy or a miner in some outlandish place! Oh, you are a satisfactory heir for a man to have! I wish to Heaven there was no such thing as sons!"

"Your admonitions are not very logical or consistent!" sneered Gerald. "One instant you tell me I am a ruined beggar, and advise me to emigrate; the next moment you abuse me for agreeing to your proposition. May I ask if there is any other course you can suggest to me?"

"Yes, sir; there is another course open to you by which you can retrieve your errors and follies—a pleasant and honorable course. Such a chance has been given to you as you don't deserve. You have neither brains, energy, nor steadiness ever to earn a dime honestly for yourself. All you are good for is to dress yourself up and idle about. You look well, it is true, in your dress-suit, for the Tracys were always a handsome stock, though I say it that shouldn't. Now, what you have to do is to make the best of the good looks you still have left after your dissipated life; make up to some woman who has money enough to set you on your feet, and marry her at once."

"I'll be shot if I do anything of the kind! I am not quite such a fool as to run my head into such a noose as that; and if you consider that an 'honorable' course, I can tell you sir, your ideas on that point are very different from mine; for I consider it one of the meanest and most dishonorable actions a man could be guilty of to marry a woman simply to make a convenience of her to pay off debts. I consider that I should forfeit all claim to be called a gentleman if I descended to that."

"Are you really such an idiot as you are pretending to be, or are you entangled with some factory or ballet-girl, and so, prevented from making a respectable match?"

"I am entangled in no way, nor have I ever frequented the society of the class you mention; but I shall preserve my independence and self-respect even if I have to lose all else!"

"Self-respect, indeed! I wish you would add a little common-sense to your other qualities. You talk like a love-sick school-girl! I should like to know who ever thought it dishonorable or ungentlemanly to marry a wife with means? It is a fair exchange, and done every day. Look at Maurice Blake! His property was mortgaged up to the very hall door when he came in for it. Did he moon about ranting of 'self-respect' or such-like rubbish? Not he. Like the sensible fellow he was, he looked out for a woman to help him out of his difficulties. He married forty thousand dollars, cleared his property, and has a neat income besides, and can enjoy himself like a man. Did you ever hear any one speak of him as 'mean or ungentlemanly' for doing so?"

"I'd rather cut my throat than have such a sour-faced old tabby sitting opposite me every day! No wonder Maurice spends half his time away from home!"

It was surely some mischievous imp that put those words into Gerald's mouth at that moment, for Mrs. Maurice Blake was standing just behind a row of evergreens. She had come over to pay a morning visit; but, hearing the lively altercation between Loftus and his son, she had drawn near, under cover of the hedge, and listened with great amusement and satisfaction until she received the just punishment of listeners in Gerald's speech. She turned livid with rage and spite, and swore to be revenged on the young man; and she was not a woman whose hate ended with idle threats.

"All women are pretty much alike after a few years," sagely remarked Mr. Tracy; "but the solid advantages of money always remain."

"Were those your sentiments when you married my mother?" asked Gerald, scornfully.

"That has nothing whatever to do with the present case, sir. I never led the life you have done. I was not head and ears in debt. If I had been such a fool, of course I could not have afforded to please myself with a wife. You

have got yourself into a regular fix. I can't and won't help you; and only for this chance you would really have to emigrate. But I don't think you can be such a fool as to sacrifice all your prospects in life when you have it in your power to redeem yourself."

Gerald Tracy was very fond of his home and all its surroundings. He had always been made much of and spoiled, and led a pleasant, easy life. He was not in any way suited for a hard or rough life, and he knew it.

It would have been a great grief to him to be obliged to quit the circle in which he had always moved, and begin an untried mode of life.

"What is the chance you spoke of?" he asked, moodily.

His father brightened up. He saw signs of yielding in the question.

"Well, you know, your aunt Henderson left the money you thought to get to a distant cousin of hers and mine, Nora Standish. I had a letter from Mary Standish, the mother, a few days ago, alluding very kindly to the disappointment you had had, and asking me to send you there on a visit. Of course, that is only one way of proposing a match between you and Nora. There is no possible objection you can raise to it. The girl is young and handsome, and has the money you want to pull you through. I think you are the luckiest dog I ever heard of, to get such a chance—a chance far better than you deserve. If you can only get the girl to accept you your fortune's made."

"And although I have never seen this Nora Standish, I have the greatest aversion to her, knowing the deceit and the arts she must have used to wheedle my aunt into leaving her the fortune."

"There you are out again, my wise fellow; for she did not see your aunt for two years before her death, and it was expressly stated in the will that she was chosen because she never toadied to my sister."

"She might have made the same remark of me, too. I took good care never to toady to her. It would have been better for me if I had."

"Well, you know now exactly how matters stand. Will you go and look after the girl or not?"

"I suppose there is nothing else left to me; but I don't commit myself to anything. I'll have a look at her, and if I can make up my mind to the sacrifice at all, I'll go through with it. It is a toss-up between Scylla and Charybdis, and I'll see which is the worse of them."

"You are an impudent, ungrateful hound!" was Loftus's last paternal remark, as he and his son walked off in opposite directions.

When they had gone, Mrs. Maurice Blake emerged from her hiding-place, and shook her fist after Gerald.

"I'll spoil your little plot, my fine fellow, as sure as my name is Laura Blake!" she cried, with a spiteful laugh. "I know the Standishes, and can put a spoke in your wheel! Laura is as proud as Lucifer, and I'll prepare her to receive you. I have the game in my own hands!"

CHAPTER II.

THE TABLES TURNED.

It was three o'clock on a lovely July afternoon, and Gerald Tracy and his friend Captain Wallis were walking along Sea Beach.

That lovely spot had never looked lovelier than it did at that moment.

The view all round was clear and beautiful as a panorama of fairyland, lying sparkling in the sheen of the dazzling sun.

But neither of the young men paid much attention to the charms of nature so lavishly displayed before their eyes.

On Gerald Tracy's face was depicted gloom and scorn; on that of his friend, compassionate sympathy; for Gerald had come here to offer himself up, a sacrifice to the matrimonial

altar, and he regarded the deed as an heroic martyrdom.

Captain Wallis, his college chum and *Fidus Achate*, had come to stand by him, and see him safely through it.

An invitation had been procured for him to stay at the Standishes' while Gerald remained. They were both slowly wending their way to the house.

Had any one suggested to Gerald Tracy that he was more an object of envy than of pity if he won Nora Standish for his wife, he would simply have thought they were out of their senses.

Captain Wallis shared his friend's feelings on the subject, and was loud in the praise of the noble self-abnegation he had shown, by acquiescing in his parent's plans for his settlement in life.

And yet Captain Wallis was not, like Gerald, a railer against the "holy state," but, on the contrary, was engaged to a very pretty girl, and felt deeply aggrieved that her father insisted upon a year's probation before he would give his consent to the marriage.

"Pretty, round here," he remarked, nodding toward the sea.

Gerald assented with a profound sigh, and both puffed away at their cigars, and pursued their way in silence.

"Suppose we must soon show up at the house?" remarked Gerald, in lugubrious tones.

Captain Wallis looked at him with tender pity.

"Well, old fellow, perhaps the sooner it's got through with the better," he replied, encouragingly. "It's just three now."

"I don't want to put in the whole afternoon there," growled Gerald.

"If we turn up at five or six it will be time enough. Let's stay here for a while."

They threw themselves down on the sand just behind a huge rock, which sheltered them from the sun's rays, and drawing their hats over their eyes, seemed disposed to take a nap.

But they had not been very many minutes there when the sound of footsteps and girlish voices roused them.

They both looked briskly around the boulder, and nodded approvingly when they had made their inspection.

Two exceedingly pretty girls came in view, and each such a contrast to the other, that they served to set off each other's beauty.

The smaller of them was a piquant, coquetish blonde—archness and roguery lurking in the depths of her lustrous blue eyes, and playing round the corners of her tiny rosebud of a mouth. She was tossing her head as she walked and shaking her golden hair about in distracting disorder.

Her companion was much taller and stouter. Her hair and eyes were a dark brown; her nose slightly aquiline; her mouth well formed, and indicating plenty of firmness.

She seemed greatly moved at something as she approached. Her large eyes were flashing through their long lashes; a vivid color burned on her cheek, and her whole manner and appearance were animated and indignant.

"It is almost incredible," she was saying, candidly; "only I have it here before me in black and white! I could not have believed it possible that any one supposed to be a gentleman would be such a mean, despicable creature!"

"Walking into some poor cove," remarked Captain Wallis to Gerald, *so t' voce*.

"Yes, dear; it is abominable," assented the blonde, in a sweet, cooing voice. "He is an odious wretch. I am glad we know about him beforehand."

"Yes," replied the first speaker, bitterly; "I am thankful for that. Just to think that I had made up my mind to be as nice as ever I could be to him, and felt so sorry for his disappointment, horrid, double-dealing hypocrite! I see now he was just served rightly."

"Have you the letter? I am dying to hear it."

"Yes; here it is. Sit down, and let us read

it over. I don't feel as if I could ever make up my mind to go back to the house and be civil to the reptile."

They sat down a little in front of the two gentlemen, who were hidden completely from their view.

Gerald and Captain Wallis looked at each other in amused perplexity.

They could not retire without being seen, and thus letting the fair speakers know that they had been overheard. Besides, it did not concern them, and was very amusing, and anything which served to raise their depressed spirits was welcome; so they remained perfectly quiet.

The two girls were Nora Standish and her sister Ada.

Nora drew a letter from her pocket, and with great scorn and emphasis began to read:

"DEAREST NORA:—No doubt you will be surprised to receive a letter from me before your mother has answered my last, but I am writing on a very solemn and important subject, and for your own private reading. I need not tell you, my sweet girl, that I have always admired and loved you, and that which I now communicate is dictated only by the sentiments of affection I bear toward you. Did I consult my own inclinations only, I should not interfere in a matter so delicate and important."

"I wish she wouldn't prose so," remarked Ada, impatiently.

"Now, just listen to this, Ada:

"By the most extraordinary, and, as I feel bound to think, providential chance, I happened to overhear a conversation between Mr. Loftus Tracy and his precious son and heir."

"What in the world was that noise, Ada?"

"Oh, I don't know. Nothing but the tide, I guess. Do go on."

"The old man, who is a great miser, was furious with young Hopeful's conduct. It seems he has plunged into the worst kinds of vice and dissipation. He is head and ears in debt, and unless he marries some poor girl with money, he will have to clear out and run away."

"What a wretch! And that's the man who is coming to stay in the house with us?"

"Yes; isn't he an acquisition? But you haven't heard the worst part yet."

"His father swore he would not give him five dollars to save him from prison. (I expect he is tired helping him out of his scrapes.)"

"Young Tracy, who had a most violent temper and insolent manner, answered his father in such an undutiful and daring way that I felt afraid the earth would open and swallow him up."

"After a horrible and unseemly altercation, that I would have given worlds to avoid, only I could not escape without being seen by them. Loftus told his son that there was only one chance left for him to save himself from ruin."

"Guess my horror when I heard the old schemer name you as the victim to be offered up to save this profligate from the just punishment of his villainy."

"He, in the coarsest possible words, refused to take you at any price."

"Oh, the impertinent monster! I wish I could run this parasol through him!"

"Never mind, Nora; we will pay him out some way or other, never fear."

"I never felt so humiliated in my life," said Nora, bursting into tears. "I did not think there could be such an abyss of degradation in any human creature!"

"Then, the letter continues, 'Mr. Loftus Tracy fumed and hinted at some disgraceful entanglement which prevented his son from making use of your money; but told him he might either marry you or emigrate to Australia. This drove the vile young man into a corner; but he remarked that although he had never seen you, he loathed you for the deceit and wheedling you used to get Miss Henderson's money.'"

"Oh, the abominable story-teller! And you never went near her!"

"What can you expect but falsehood and slander from such a man, my dear?" said Nora, in great scorn; and continued to read:

"At last Loftus admitted that your mother herself had proposed a match between you and this young man, and invited him on a visit to let him see if he would like you."

"Now, Ada, may I ask what you think of that?"

"It gets more and more dreadful; but please go on."

"The reprobate, in a condescending tone that made my blood boil, at last signified his gracious consent to having a look at you, and said that if he could at all make up his mind to the sacrifice, he

would go through with it, as he was between Scylla and Charybdis, and had no way of escape." I quote his own odious words. As soon as I could get away I did so, feeling deeply thankful that I had been so marvelously led to the spot as to overhear the plots against you, and perhaps to be the humble instrument of saving you from their base designs."

"My dearest Nora, believe me there is no lot on this earth so utterly wretched as that of a woman who has been married merely for her money."

"Ah, poor thing! she speaks from experience; but I must say Maurice Blake has always been very nice to me whenever we met."

"Yes; but, you see, you are not his wife, Ada, and that makes all the difference. I shall always feel deeply grateful to her for opening my eyes and warning me against this heartless wretch. It is pure kindness on her part for she says:—

"If this Gerald Tracy possessed one good or honorable quality, or gave the slightest promise of ever becoming a reputable member of society or a steady husband, I should have let matters take their course, knowing how much it would add to my happiness to have you settled near me; but I could let no such selfish consideration prevent me imploring you, as you value your self-respect and future happiness, never to let yourself be made the tool of that ruined scamp and his miserly old father."

"Not much fear of you being such a fool, Nora, dear. I wish we had some way of punishing the wretch."

"But just to think of mamma offering me to him! I think worse of that than anything."

"Well, you see, she did not know the sort of character he was, and I am sure it was all on account of the way you flirt with that Mr. Spread."

"You need not talk of flirting, Ada, for you flirted twice as much with Charley Wade—and you engaged, too!"

"That's just the difference, dear. There is no harm in my amusing myself. I'm safe—like a married woman, almost; but papa and mamma were afraid you might be taken in by that scheming fortune hunter."

"Not much fear of that. I detest those straw-colored men; but even if I did choose to marry him, I wonder what objection there is to him more than to this Gerald Tracy? Both are men of bad character, and simply coming after me to be able to make use of my money for their odious vices. I wish I had never got the abominable thing!"

"Not you, my dear; that's only a metaphorical way of speaking. Look at poor me—obliged to wait until Tom gets promoted before I can marry him! Oh, dear! if I had the slightest idea that Mrs. Henderson was looking out for somebody to leave her money to, I should have put forth all my fascinations to charm her. I love money."

"That's all talk, Ada. If you cared as much for money as you pretend, you would have married a rich man instead of engaging yourself to a poor one."

"Ah, all the money in the world would not make up for being tied to a savage. But let us settle what we are to do with your disinterested suitor. If it were not for poor mamma we could pretend to be each other. I should glory in accepting his offer, and seeing his face when I told him I was the pauper."

"Yes, that would just pay him out; but it is impossible. Look here, Ada, you know you are very pretty."

"A thousand thanks for the compliment! Only I am too lazy I would rise and courtesy; but I may remark, in return, that I have heard the same opinion expressed about you. Might I ask why you feed my vanity in that barefaced manner?"

"Because I want you to make a fool of this fortune-hunter. I believe you could make any man fall in love with you, if you tried. Do try to fascinate him. Of course, at first he will make up to me; but I shall turn the cold shoulder on him, and you can easily attract him; and when he loses his heart to you, we can both laugh at him."

"That's all very fine, but do you suppose a man like that has any heart to lose? If he were anything of a noble animal, I might succeed; but greed for money is a passion not to be influenced by any tender emotion. I might have

all my trouble for nothing, and then I should feel small."

"Well, you can try, at all events. I have heard that he has always been running after girls; so he may be weak on that point and easily taken in."

"So be it then. I shall equip myself for conquest and blaze forth in the full splendor of my charms. You must hold yourself aloof, and indulge in none of your intellectual flights. Don't make use of your speaking eyes, as one of your ardent admirers calls them. You had better take his friend in hand; it will keep you from occupying yourself with him at all. It will be the safest way, and the other may be nice."

"Very likely, indeed, when he is a friend of Gerald Tracy. Another edition of himself, I expect."

"Well I think the whole thing promises to be very good fun, and nothing at all for you to look so woe-begone about. Let us go back now; it is getting late."

CHAPTER III.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

As soon as the two girls had gone a safe distance, Captain Wallis gave a long whistle, then burst into a hearty fit of laughter, and exclaimed:

"Gerald, my boy, you are in a pretty fix! By Jove! how they both did pitch into you! I would not be in your shoes for a trifle."

A wonderful change had taken place in Gerald Tracy. All his listless and gloomy expression had vanished. His eyes were sparkling with anger, and his whole frame quivering with suppressed wrath.

"I'll be even with her yet," he said bitterly. "A woman who could misjudge and slander a man like that deserves to get a lesson. It is unbearable!"

"But which of them do you mean? I think the little fair one was the hardest on you."

"Do you think I mind what a doll like that says? I think as little of it as I would of the scratching of a kitten; but Nora Standish is different."

"I must confess that I don't think her so much to blame at all. Recollect she has never seen you, and can only judge you by what she hears. Who could have written that diabolical letter, and is there any foundation at all for what is asserted in it about you?"

"It was written by a Mrs. Blake, who lives near us, and who must have been prowling about, and meanly listened to the row between me and my father. The governor was in one of his furies, and provoked me so that I hardly knew what I said; and when he advised me to marry money, and quoted Maurice Blake as an example of prudence, I told him I would rather be shot than live with such a sour-faced tabby as his wife."

"A woman never forgives a speech like that. She would be sure to take her revenge, and she has done it neatly. You can easily disprove the slanders about your character, and I am sure you can deny ever having spoken about Miss Standish as she represented."

"That's just what I cannot do. I was ass enough to talk a lot of bosh in my temper, and I did think she must have acted badly about my aunt's money, and said so; but now I know I was mistaken. I refused to marry any one for mere money; but when I saw myself completely cornered, I said if I could at all make up my mind to the sacrifice I would go through with it, and I did finish up with that beastly speech about Scylla and Charybdis. You thought yourself that it was very hard lines that I should have this marriage forced upon me."

"Well, I don't think so now, for I think Nora Standish is a splendid girl, and you will be a lucky dog if you get her with or without money. If she devotes herself to me as the two planned, I shall have to cut and run, or poor Clara might go to the wall."

"It is not at all probable that she will devote herself to you. You seem to forget that the opinion she has of you is quite as low as the one she has of me. I wonder what would be the wisest thing to do?"

"I think your best course would be to make a clean breast of it to the girl. Tell her the exact truth; say you spoke in a passion, and in complete ignorance of her real character, and let her know why Mrs. Blake has such a spite against you. That will open her eyes, and make her distrust the letter. If you play your cards properly she will forgive you."

"Forgive me, indeed! You seem to forget what I have to forgive her. She has vilified and abused me beyond the power of endurance. I swear on my honor, by all I hold sacred, that I will never ask her to become my wife!"

"Now, don't be a fool, Gerald. You are angry and don't know what you say. When you think it over calmly, you will acknowledge that any girl of spirit would have felt the same."

"If it is in the power of man to do it, I will make her alter her opinion of me. I'll bend her pride yet! Wallis, you promised to stand by me in this affair!"

"So I will, old fellow; but I never thought things would take this twist. What will you do?"

"They would have persuaded each other to take us in, only they could not manage it. I'll adopt the idea. You shall be the reprobate, Gerald Tracy, and I shall be his friend. Nora will be thrown off her guard, and we shall take them in."

"I don't think the plan feasible. Some one down here is sure to know us, and then what apology have we to make to the old people? And even if we manage to escape detection, I don't see any object to be gained by it."

"Don't you see that if I now appear before her in my true form, she will avoid and repulse me, and I shall have no opportunity of making her know me and like me? As Captain Wallis, she may endure my society until I make my inuings; when she may find I am not the odious wretch she thought me."

"Very good, my friend; *et apres?*"

"*Apres*, my dear Wallis, when I have righted myself in her judgment, I shall politely take my leave. Oh, you may look as incredulous as you like. I have made up my mind."

"You will be playing with edged tools, and end in being head and ears in love with her. I'll help you in your little game, for I know it will all come right in the end."

"If I loved her to distraction the result would be precisely the same. I shall never ask her to marry me. Yes, whistle away; you might know me well enough now to know that I can be firm."

"We shall see what we shall see. I think we shall come to grief; but I shall throw all the blame on your shoulders!"

"So you may; I am willing to bear it. I have been so little in Boston for years, that there is not much chance of my meeting anybody I know here. I shall drill Trim into his part, and I have no doubt but that all will go right long enough for what I want, at all events."

"And 'm to be delivered up to the tender mercies of that pretty little flirt. What will Clara say?"

"You are too old a bird to be caught with chaff, and can take care of yourself; and for Heaven's sake don't let Clara get wind of the affair at all! Women never can keep a secret, and we have had enough mischief done to us by one of the sex already."

"Clara is discretion and good-nature itself. There would be no fear of her letting out our secret; but she is as jealous as the mischief, and I think would tear the eyes out of our little Ada if she knew her designs on me. So, on the whole, I shall make a mental reservation when I write my letters to her."

"Yes, do; the fewer who know of our affairs the better. Now, come along; the farce is about to begin."

They reached Aspell House about half an hour later. It was a very handsome residence, and situated so as to command a good view of both land and sea, and the grounds were tastefully laid out, and there was a profusion of flowers everywhere.

Coming up the long avenue, they fortunately met Trim and their *valet*, and impressed upon him that he was always to call them by each other's names.

The man immediately entered into the spirit of the thing, and was greatly delighted at having such an important secret intrusted to his prudence.

Mr. and Mrs. Standish were a handsome, easy-going, hospitable couple of the old school type. When the gentlemen were announced, Captain Wallis, as Gerald Tracy, was welcomed so frankly and heartily, that he felt ready to sink through the floor with shame at his duplicity.

Not so the true Gerald. Thinking only of his scheme of revenge, he viewed with great complacency the success of his trick, and kept his eye steadily fixed upon his friend, while that unhappy individual floundered through his replies to the various inquiries made to him respecting his parents, neighbors, Tracy Park, etc.

Fearing he might find himself out of his depth if these questions were pushed too far, Gerald adroitly turned the conversation, and exerted himself to such good purpose, that both Mr. and Mrs. Standish were charmed with him, and congratulated themselves upon having found two such nice young men to brighten up the house and amuse the girls.

Mrs. Standish rung for tea, and told the butler to ask the young ladies to come down.

That functionary returned in a few minutes, and gravely announced that the young ladies were still walking, but the roguish twinkle in his eye belied his words.

Gerald and Captain Wallis knew perfectly that the two girls were in the house, but determined to have as little of their society as possible.

The old couple invited their guests out of doors, and they sauntered about the grounds until the dressing-bell rung.

Mrs. Standish several times expressed surprise at the non-appearance of her daughters, and the moment she returned to the house she asked if they had come in, and gave a sigh of relief when she heard that they were in their rooms.

For the said young ladies, having been all their lives spoiled and indulged to the top of their bent, were very apt to act just as their caprices moved them, and it would have been nothing very wonderful if they had absented themselves altogether if they did not approve of their visitors.

The low opinion which they had formed of Gerald and his friend did not in the least prevent them using every means to make the best possible impression on them. They spared no pains to enhance their natural beauty, but appeared in exquisite toilets, and looked bewilderingly lovely.

Gerald Tracy watched them both keenly when Captain Wallis was presented to them as their cousin, and he could not withhold his admiration at their wonderful powers of dissimulation.

Nora received him with an affectation of perfect good-natured indifference; shook hands with him; with a smile, asked after Mr. and Mrs. Tracy, and remarked that it was quite too good of him to come and stay in their dull house; and all this with such a true air of going through a polite duty, in which she had not the slightest interest, that Captain Wallis felt his cheek flush with annoyance, although he knew what was beneath the surface.

Ada, on the contrary, shyly cast down her eyes as she greeted him; then, looking archly up, asked, with a pretty pout, whether he was to be "Mr. Tracy" or "Gerald." If he was their cousin, she thought he was just horrible for never coming to see them before.

This direct attack restored Captain Wallis's equilibrium. He was in his element in a moment. With a look of bold admiration, which made even the practiced Ada blush, he replied promptly that he should insist upon his cousinship; that he was well punished for any remissness in the past by the knowledge of what he had lost by it; and for the future she would find that he erred in the opposite extreme.

Ada smiled and showed her little pearls of teeth, and brought the full artillery of her eyes in play.

Nora curled her lip and entered into conversation with Gerald Tracy.

While she talked, she mentally compared the two men, and congratulated herself that this cousin of hers, though plausible and good-looking, was not at all the style of man to whom she would lose her heart. He might use all his fascinations, and she could feel safe. Had it been this handsome, half-sad, half-stern friend of his, it might been more dangerous and harder for her to be firm to her resolve. She had to admit that neither of the young men looked at all like the hardened villain she had imagined them; but she decided that men were so deep and artful, that no one could ever guess what they really were.

She felt very much inclined to be agreeable to this Captain Wallis, who looked as if he had something on his mind; and the very coldness he showed toward her piqued her into trying to win his attention, for indifference to a woman accustomed to admiration is only an incitement to coquetry.

The dinner passed off gayly.

Gerald Tracy was the only one who was not really in good spirits; but even he contributed to the general amusement, for he was determined to appear at his best. As he was handsome, witty, and well-informed, he had no difficulty in attracting general attention and admiration.

More than once he found Nora's eyes fixed on him with an expression which filled him with triumph, which at once turned to a sharp pang of pain.

Mrs. Standish had so arranged that Captain Wallis should sit near Nora, and remembering his assumed character, he began to pay her rather extravagant attention; but her supreme composure and indifference disconcerted him immensely; and when, at the end of what he considered a very delicately turned compliment, she started as if rousing herself from a reverie, and coolly asked him to repeat his remark, he felt completely annihilated, and gave up trying to act the lover, and devoted his attention to Ada, who sat opposite to him and favored him with every variety of coquettish glance.

Gerald was exceedingly pleased at his friend's discomfiture, and plumed himself on his cleverness in exposing him to it instead of himself; and while he felt greatly gratified at being able to attract Nora's regard, he did not feel the least ashamed of doing so under false pretenses, for it was "diamond cut diamond."

In the drawing-room that evening, Captain Wallis devoted himself openly to Ada, and there could be no doubt whatever that these two young people were carrying on a violent flirtation.

Their cousinship gave them an excuse for their sudden intimacy.

Mr. and Mrs. Standish looked disconcerted; but they never ventured to oppose any whim of their daughters, so were helpless.

Ada had bound them over, under threats of her dire displeasure, not to mention her engagement to any one. She therefore passed as free, except to a very few initiated friends.

The old people thought it a great pity that when she did not want Gerald for herself she should prevent Nora having him; but with their happy way of looking at everything from a cheerful point, they decided that as Nora seemed to fancy Captain Wallis, it might be all for the best.

He was a charming young man, and as like-

ly to make a good husband as another, and there could be no difficulty about money when dear Nora had so much.

Nora and Gerald seemed very well satisfied to be left to each other's society.

They found that their voices went very well together. They tried over several duets; talked over music, poetry, and things in general; while they found that even when their opinions did not agree, there was a marvelous sympathy between their tastes and ideas.

Gerald's antagonistic feelings toward his cousin were fast vanishing. He had to acknowledge to himself that he had never met any one who came so near his standard of perfection.

Nora was very handsome. She had a dignified composure that did not in the least take from the girlish sweetness and freshness of her manner or hide her natural wit and vivacity.

She was clever, too, and enthusiastic; and when interested in her subject, her whole face was irradiated, while her lustrous eyes dilated, and she looked like one inspired.

Gerald felt himself fast falling under the spell of her beauty and fascinating manner.

The more he resisted the influence which was stealing over him, the stronger it grew, and a hundred times he cursed the vindictive malice of Mrs. Blake, which had destroyed all his hopes of future happiness.

"Now, Nora, let us talk them over," exclaimed Ada, flinging herself into an easy-chair in her sister's bedroom, when they had retired for the night.

"I'll begin with mine. He is as nice as ever he can be. I can hardly believe a word Miss Blake wrote of him."

"Unfortunately there is no room for doubt on the subject; but I always heard he was a flirt. Now, he naturally likes you best, and knows how to make himself fascinating."

"Yes; but if he were the sordid wretch she said, and wanted to marry you merely for your money, he would not lose his time making up to poor little pauper me."

"Well, he did attempt a few elaborate compliments and tender looks at dinner; but I quenched his ardor on the spot. I think he would have been a perfect stoic if he had resisted you. You did your part splendidly. I never saw such a consummate flirt!"

"Then just look in the glass at once, dear, and you'll not be able to say that again. Any impartial judge would say that you flirted simply outrageously with handsome 'Sir Lancelot,' as I shall call him. I admit that our styles are different. You go in for exchange of sentiments, finding out affinities, murmuring softly, looking unutterable things out of your big eyes, and all that sort of thing. It is far more dangerous than any harmless fun I may indulge in."

"If you call it flirting to have a sensible conversation on general subjects with a well-informed man, I can't help it. It is very absurd. All that passed between me and Captain Wallis might be printed to-morrow for all I care."

"Now, Nora, don't be such a hypocrite! You know you did flirt, and why not? It was only natural and right. I don't see why you should deny it. I never do. He is awfully handsome—a melancholy, deep style; very interesting, though, on the whole, Gerald suits me better. Don't think I was too selfishly engrossed to have an eye to your future interests. I fished out lots about Captain Wallis."

"How could that affect my future interests?"

"Well, strange as it may appear to you, it did occur to me that, in the remote future, such a miracle might happen as you and he falling in love with each other, so I was resolved to find out if he would do, and I think he will."

"You are more absurd than ever to-night, Ada. I do not think it very likely that I shall fall in love with either of those young men when I know the sort of characters they are;

but what wonderful things did you discover about Captain Wallis?"

"I asked Gerald where his friend came from, and what Wallis he was, and heard that he was second son of old Mr. Wallis, of Ashleigh—a lonely place. My next query was whether his eldest brother was at all delicate, or likely to die soon?"

"I hope you never said such a thing as that?"

"Yes, but I did, though; and Gerald roared with laughter, and said unfortunately the eldest son was a most muscular Christian, and likely to outlive his friend."

"The next information was that the poor wretch had only a thousand a year."

"I suggested that he should look out for a wife with money."

"Gerald virtuously replied that his friend would never ask a rich woman to marry him."

"He regretted that he would be obliged to wait for two years before the next leap-year would enable some heiress to propose to him."

"I then inquired, artlessly, if my cousin shared his sentiments on that matter. Gerald, with a profound sigh, which seemed to emerge from his very boots, remarked that all the chance of that was over for him now. This statement, accompanied by a killing look, I take to mean that he is satisfied to be the victim of your humble servant's charms and has given up all designs on your money; and if he has, he can't be so bad, you know."

"I don't believe he has done anything of the kind. He is a weak fool, and can't resist your fascinations; but he will try to secure my money, all the same."

"I don't mean to let him, for I like him very much, in spite of his rascality; and it is pleasant to have somebody while Tom is away. Besides, you have your 'Sir Lancelot' to take up your time, and if you can overcome his scruples about a rich wife, or your own in proposing for him, you would make a nice couple."

"How you do rattle on! You know quite well you are talking nonsense. I am not so ready to throw myself at any man who happens to spend a few days here."

"Of course not, dear; but you know, 'There is a tide in the affairs of women,' etc., and this may be the critical moment to take it at the flood. Don't wax wroth. I'm off to bed. Good-night. Dream of dark eyes!"

"Well, Gerald, a nice scoundrel I feel to palm myself off as you on those kind, simple people! A sweet row there'll be when we are found out! I hope you admire me doing the cousin to pretty Ada and calling her by her Christian name. I couldn't screw up my courage to attempt the same with the other."

"I think the whole thing went off very well. The old people would merely look upon it as a very justifiable trick if they knew all, and of course I shall tell what led us to act so, when we are found out. You see yourself that if Nora had known who I was she would not have given me a chance of speaking to her."

"You managed to get in a good deal of speaking, and looking, and various other things, in your borrowed character. What do you think of that sharp little cousin of yours pumping me delightfully as to Captain Wallis's family, prospects, etc.? She saw how you and her sister were suited for each other, and I think quite approves of the match. You are lucky; she is a splendid girl."

"And what is that to me? I would rather a thousand times she was hideous and disagreeable. I could resign all thoughts of her with less pain."

"Don't keep up that farce. You can't be such an idiot now, as not to go in and win? You see she likes you, and I am sure she is worthy of any man's love."

"You know perfectly well, Wallis, that I have sworn never to ask her to be my wife. No matter what it costs me, I shall not break

my word; but I hope to prove to her before I leave her forever that I am not so utterly despicable as she thought."

"If I imagined for one moment that you were such an ass, I would start off to-morrow, and leave you to your own idiotic devices; but I live in hopes that you may come to your senses in a few days, and get over your silly temper."

"I shall not argue the point. You shall see for yourself whether I change my purpose or not. You need not mind; your role is agreeable enough."

"Yes; I have no objection to keep up my cousinship with the charming Ada. And now, old fellow, take my advice, and sleep off your morbid fancies, and be clothed in your right mind when I see you to-morrow morning. Good-night!"

CHAPTER IV.

A BOLD MASQUERADER.

A WEEK had passed. Ada Standish and Captain Wallis had enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

Both practiced flirts, and able to keep their hearts and heads cool, they had carried on the game with all the zest and skill of true artists.

Yet Ada was greatly puzzled. No one could be more devoted than her new admirer. He never lost an opportunity of being in her society or paying her marked attention. But she felt that, in reality, she had not subdued him or made him fall in love with her, as she had intended.

She had been met with her own weapons, and partly foiled. The laughing compliment, open love-making, daring looks and speeches, were not, she well knew, the signs of a man deeply in love.

She perceived that he was simply carrying on a violent flirtation with her, and responding to her own advances.

What his object in this was she could not divine. If he had come on the serious business of marrying her sister, in order to make use of her money to save him from ruin, why had he abandoned his object without any effort? And if ruin were staring him in the face, how could he be so light-hearted and indifferent to consequences?

Nora and she had talked it over and over, but neither could solve the difficulty.

It did not interest Nora much, for now all her thoughts were occupied by her cousin's handsome friend, who was quite as great an enigma in his own way as the other.

She had never before met a man who fascinated her as this man did. She admired his appearance, his intellect, his very melancholy, unaccountable change of mood and manner, for Gerald was strangely perplexed in his mind, and was so torn and swayed by conflicting emotions, that this behavior was most capricious.

One day he would seem all devotion and tenderness, and exert all his powers to captivate Nora. The very next day he would be cold, indifferent, almost rude. At other times he would be so dejected, and plunged in such gloom and depression, that he found it impossible to shake it off and rouse himself sufficiently to take his part in the ladies' society, and would make excuses for absenting himself from the circle.

Nora felt almost sure that he loved her. It seemed impossible that such subtle sympathy and intuitive appreciation of each other could exist unless some deeper feeling lay beneath it. She knew she loved him, and thought she had pride enough to hide the fact from every one's knowledge; but Gerald read her secret in her true eyes, and his heart swelled with a strange, wild joy, for he valued the love of this girl more than anything in life.

He could not always remain firm to his miserable resolve, or deny himself the gratification of enjoying the society of the one he loved, and yielding himself now and then to the full charm of the moment.

It was then that they felt the full confidence in each other's affection, which they confessed as plainly by looks and tones as if they had spoken; but Gerald brought himself severely to task after these fits of weakness, and after a sharp struggle, determined not to give way again.

Then would ensue dreary hours of coldness and reserve, and Nora, in the solitude of her chamber, wept bitterly over the power which this man used so cruelly over her.

She attributed his changeable conduct entirely to his pride and delicacy.

The dread of being thought a fortune-hunter prevented him asking her to be his wife.

She began to hate her wealth, which seemed to have some ill-luck attached to it that stood between her and her happiness.

For the first few days the young men were strangely averse to mixing in the society of the neighborhood; but they soon learned that there were no people at Sea Beach whom they had met before.

They had become more daring, too, and hardened, less fearful of a discovery. They entered so completely into their different roles, that they almost felt as if they were in reality the individuals they personated.

They therefore allowed themselves to be exhibited at the hops at the hotel, joined in several tennis-parties and afternoon teas, and made themselves generally agreeable and useful.

Nora and Ada were greatly envied by their lady friends for having two such delightful escorts actually staying in their house. They said among each other that it was a most charming arrangement, and seemed likely to turn out well.

That handsome Captain Wallis, who had no money, was devoted to Nora, the heiress, who evidently liked him; and Ada, who had hardly any fortune, had made a conquest of her cousin, who would be a wealthy man some day; for although no one knew either Gerald Tracy or Captain Wallis personally, almost every one knew who they were, and could give full particulars of their family and means.

Thus a month passed, a month full of gayety and laughter, love and pain, weakness and pride.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening. The two girls and their companions had strolled out after dinner to hear the band, but they had wandered away from the crowd on the beach to a quiet path overlooking the ocean.

The sun was setting in the full splendor of his gorgeous evening glory, and tinted the beauteous landscape with his roseate shades. The sea was rippling gently and plashing softly against the beach and rocks. All around was lovely, peaceful in the hazy summer evening.

Ada had been more than usually piqued that day by the conduct of her supposed cousin. She had boldly asked him if he were in love with any one, and had received a reply in the affirmative, so promptly and heartily given, that she was quite convinced of its truth.

All the stereotyped speeches, sighs, and hints, to make her believe that she was the object of adoration, did not impose upon her in the least; and she was exceedingly annoyed to think it possible that any man could be exposed to the full force of her charms and arts, and not only remain unsubdued, but acknowledge that his heart was given to some one else.

She redoubled her efforts; and between her wondrous beauty, her daring coquetry, the soft intoxication of the hour, the scene, the distant music borne on the breeze, Captain Wallis began to lose his head, and vowed that she was the most bewitching siren that ever tempted a man to make a fool of himself.

It must be said for Ada, that believing Captain Wallis to be her cousin Gerald, she treated him with a degree of familiarity she never would have indulged in had she known that, in reality, he was a stranger.

While Gerald and Nora were sitting dreamily watching the sinking sun, and sighing a soft accompaniment to the sobbing of the sea, Ada

and Captain Wallis were carrying on a lively battle for the possession of a rose, which he maintained she had promised to give him.

Ada, with the prettiest pouts and brightest flashes of pretended anger, defended her treasure, and finally ran down the sloping path as if to escape from her tormentor's importunity.

Captain Wallis considered it a challenge to follow, and promptly did so.

As he came up with Ada, she sprang lightly aside, and perching herself on a piece of rock and laughingly holding up the rose, declared she had put it and herself out of his reach.

She looked so provokingly pretty and so mockingly defiant, that Captain Wallis without a moment's thought, sprang up beside her, caught her in his arms, and taking the rose and a kiss at the same time, lifted her down to the path beside him, and asked her if she would acknowledge herself conquered now.

Ada was really furious. Her cheeks blazed; her eyes flashed in earnest now.

She stamped her tiny foot on the ground, and exclaimed, angrily:

"How dare you be so impudent, Gerald? Do you think I would have allowed you to come near me if I had thought you capable of the meanness of using your horrid brute strength to get what you wanted? You have behaved abominably!"

"You should not have provoked me to it by looking so distractingly pretty," replied he, quite unabashed. "I don't see that there is anything so very dreadful in your cousin giving you a kiss, or what you are in such a temper about."

"If it were not that you *are* my cousin, I should tell papa at once of your conduct, and get him to punish you for it," retorted Ada, with severe dignity.

Captain Wallis only laughed.

"Now, Ada," he said, coaxingly, after a moment, "you and I are not going to quarrel. Just think how disagreeable it would be for both of us if we were not good friends! Don't be always so hard-hearted."

"I think you are the greatest flirt I ever met in my life," remarked she, beginning to relent.

"I am not quite sure about my being the 'greatest'," he replied, demurely.

And Ada blushed, and had to acknowledge to herself that she had brought all this upon herself by her own coquetry.

After a little more sparring, these two kindred spirits made up their difference and shook hands.

As they walked away, two gentlemen emerged from behind some rocks, near enough for them to see the little scene which had just been enacted, though they had not heard what had passed. For quiet and desolate as the spot looked, it was often frequented by those who preferred to be away from the crowd, and was a very unsafe place for any exchange of private confidences or endearment.

"Well, I suppose that little flirt has landed her fish," remarked one to the other. "I'll back Ada Standish against any girl in the world for making a fellow lose his head."

"Did you say Ada Standish?" asked his companion, quickly.

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"Not personally. But who was that with her?"

"A sort of cousin—eldest son of Loftus Tracy, of Boston. He and a Captain Wallis are staying at the Standishes', and since his arrival, Ada has had neither eyes nor ears for anybody else. They are always spooning about together. From the pantomime we have just been favored with, I conclude they are engaged, for she manages to keep fellows at a certain distance through all her flirtation, and this looks like business."

There was no reply to this, and the conversation drifted into other channels. But by that night's post a letter was dispatched to Tom Newman, from his old schoolfellow and bosom friend, James Lane, giving him a full account

of Ada's flirtation with Gerald Tracy, and informing him that he had himself seen the afore-said Gerald kiss her that very evening, and concluding with the safe advice to give the girl up at once, or run up and insist upon an explanation.

"How very lonely and still everything is!" remarked Nora Standish to Gerald Tracy, in a low, sweet voice. "Is it not strange that such perfect beauty and rest, instead of giving unmixed pleasure, fills the heart with sadness and dissatisfaction?"

"You can have little to make you sad or dissatisfied," replied he, bitterly. "Young, beautiful, rich, clever—what lot could be more perfect? If you are not happy in it, it must be from fancied sorrows. You have all you could wish for."

She did not answer in words, but raised her large eyes to his with such a pitiful, tender yearning and reproach, that his cheeks paled from the pain it cost him to maintain his self-control.

He pretended not to see or understand her mute appeal; but continued in a hard, in different tone:

"If it would amuse you to see a complete contrast to your own bright wisdom, just dissect my miserable position. I stand here this evening without a hope or possibility of leading any other life than one I loathe. Beggared, ruined by slanderous malignity, all my prospects blighted, I present as complete a foil to your happiness as you could desire."

She was frightened and inexpressibly wounded by his words; but in her unselfish love, she forgave him his harshness, and grieved for his misery.

"Why do you talk so wildly?" she asked, in her low, soothing voice. "Surely things can not be so bad as you say?"

"They could not be worse. When I leave your house, I leave hope behind. If, after paying my debts, I have sufficient money, I go to Australia or some of the Western Territories. If I cannot pay my passage, I shall work my way out, and under a new name, in a new country, in a new position, I shall try to keep body and soul together by digging, blacking boots, or some such noble and congenial occupation. Should I fail to obtain even that—well, perhaps a bullet may settle the affair more quickly and efficiently."

"I cannot bear to hear you talk like that," she exclaimed, as the tears started to her eyes. "Can you find no way out of your troubles without ruining yourself?"

She was carried away by the intensity of her feelings, and fast losing all her self-control. She stood before him with her hands clasped, and her eyes fixed pleadingly on his face.

He read clearly all she would have said; the unspoken appeal to take her to himself, and not force her to outrage her womanly pride by driving her to offer herself to him.

A fearful struggle raged in his breast. On the one hand were love, happiness, and plenty; on the other, disgrace, ruin, and degradation. But his wounded pride and silly vow held him back from seizing the chance held out to him. He told himself that his word and honor would be sacrificed and broken if he yielded to this weakness; so, with a final wrench, he tore from his heart his last hope of redemption, and looking Nora full in the face, he said, harshly, "You ask if there is no way out of my troubles? Well, none save one, and that one I should not stoop to take."

Her heart turned sick at his words and manner, but blinded by her love, she only found in them an evidence of the exaggerated honorable pride and delicacy which held him back from asking her to marry him, when he had so little to offer her in return for all her wealth.

She only admired him the more for his determination and strength of will. He was a hero in her eyes.

All the wild nobility of her generous nature urged her to rise superior to the petty shackles

of conventionalism, and freely offer what he was too proud to ask.

She had conquered her natural shrinking against the apparent boldness of this step, and was on the point of uttering words which would have committed her forever, when a merry laugh broke upon the stillness, and the next moment Ada and Captain Wallis appeared upon the scene.

Their arrival scattered all deep feeling and seriousness to the winds. Their nonsensical chatter gave the others time to recover from the agitation which still overpowered them.

Gerald purposely placed himself by Ada's side while returning home, and gave Captain Wallis an expressive glance to stay with Nora.

He did so, and rightly guessing that something disturbing had occurred, he sustained the conversation, rattling on about indifferent subjects, and considerably ignoring her silence or irrelevant replies.

By accident or design, it happened that Nora and Gerald did not find themselves alone together either during that evening or the next day, and both felt a sense of relief at being spared a repetition of such a painful struggle, at all events, for the present.

CHAPTER V.

A COMEDY OF ERRORS.

As the four young people came out of the gate of Aspell House on the evening of which we have just been speaking, they did not notice a vulgar, over-dressed man who was lounging at the opposite side of the road, smoking a cigar.

As they passed, he looked after them keenly, and muttered, "I suppose the old boy told the truth, and it's all right; but I had best glean a little information on my own account;"—and so saying, crossed to the lodge, and wished the woman who was standing at the door good-evening.

"Are those your young ladies just gone out?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Shure enough they are, sir. God bless their purty faces!"

"It looks as if you'd soon be having a wedding?"

"God send that same—two on 'em, maybe."

"I have seen one of those gentlemen before—Mr. Gerald Tracy; but who is the other?"

"A friend as come wid him; a fine, clever, nice spoken gentleman, too, but more quiet-like than Mr. Gerald."

"I hear Mr. Gerald and Miss Nora are thinking of making a match of it?"

"Deed, thin, you heard wrong. They don't go nigh each o'her, at all, at all. It's the other way about."

"What do you mean? Isn't it Miss Nora that has so much money?"

"Faix, it is, and well she knows it; and a handsome pair herself and the captain 'ill make. I'm thinking he'll be more gayer when he's sartin she'll have him. They do say he has not much money of his own, but when one has it it'll do for both."

"And didn't Mr. Gerald try to get Miss Nora and her money for himself?" asked the stranger, forcing himself to appear cool.

"Bedad, he didn't, and for why should he? When the ould gintleman dies, won't he have plenty, and an illigint place in city and country? He just loves the ground Miss Ada walks on. I don't think the one wedding 'ill be long behind the other."

"Are you quite sure, now, that it is Miss Ada that Mr. Gerald is after? I heard so positively it was her sister."

"Is it shure I am? Faix, that's a quare question to ask. If a young gentleman is always walking and sp'aking to a purty young lady, I'm thinking it's her he cares for and wants to marry, and not the one he niver looks near or nigh. And what 'u'd be the use of him looking after Miss Nora, when she's always wid the captain? Every one is axing me when the widdin's is to be, and the sooner the better, says I, barring that the house and the

ould people 'll be rale lonely when the young ladies is gone."

"Good-evening, my good woman," said the man, curtly, and walked quickly off toward the town.

The same post that carried off Mr. Lane's cheerful epistle to Tom Newman also brought one addressed to Mr. Loftus Tracy from Mr. Wasp, money-lender, bill-discounter, and many other trades and professions.

This gentleman was Gerald's principal creditor; but Mr. Tracy had given him privately to understand that his son was about to marry Miss Nora Standish, the heiress, and that no steps were to be taken about the money until the affair was arranged.

Mr. Wasp, always cautious and prudent, determined to find out for himself what way the wind blew; with what satisfactory result we have just learned.

His note informed Mr. Tracy that his son, instead of securing the heiress, had allowed her to be snapped up by his friend, Captain Wallis, and was himself generally believed to be engaged to the sister, who had not a penny.

Under these unexpected circumstances, Mr. Wasp wished to be informed what were Mr. Tracy's intentions regarding certain bills due to him, etc.

The letters delivered at Aspell House on the next morning but one were, to all outward appearance, ordinary and harmless-looking missives; but had they contained the most deadly secret explosives, they could not have occasioned more pain and consternation to their several recipients.

Half an hour after the letters had been delivered to their rightful owners, Gerald Tracy, defiant and reckless, was moodily pacing up and down his room, repeating to himself that the game was up, and it could make no great matter to him whether the *denouement* came a few days sooner or later.

Should he stay and face it, or bury himself and his disgrace out of sight and knowledge of all his former friends?

Captain Wallis was not less perturbed, in his own apartment. He sat, staring helplessly at a letter which lay on his knee, and which he more than once struck with his clinched hand; perplexity, anger, grief, were by turns displayed on his countenance.

By his pale cheek and tightly-compressed lips, it was easy to see he was going through some painfully sharp conflict. A muttered curse from time to time gave relief to the fury that was raging in his breast.

Ada Standish, half-dressed, lay on the floor of her room, where she had flung herself just after reading her letter. She was crying and sobbing hysterically, clenching her little hands and tearing her golden hair, which lay, in long, disordered curls, over her shoulders.

In the next room sat Nora, pale, cold, and still as a statue. She looked stunned from some deadly blow; but not for long did she remain so—her pride revived her. Starting up with raised hands and pain-distended eyes, she exclaimed, "Thank Heaven I was saved from the last stage of humiliation! Oh, what should I have done had I not been interrupted in my madness?"

The shortest way to explain the cause of all this woful excitement and confusion will be to make known the various contents of the letters received that morning.

We begin with Gerald's which was from his father:—

"I did not think you could surprise me by committing any act of foolery or disobedience. I have had a long and bitter experience of your performances in that line; but I must confess that your last act of idiocy has astonished even me. It seems as if some extraordinary blindness has descended upon your moral vision, which prevents you ever acting in a sensible or proper way.

"I have heard of the weak fool you have made of yourself at Sea Beach, allowing your clever friend to snap up Nora and her money from under your very nose, while her sister, an artful little chit without a penny, twists you round her finger, hoping, no doubt, that your bad conduct will soon hurry me to my grave, and that then you will come in for a nice property.

"I told you your only salvation from ruin lay in

your marrying a woman with money enough to help you out of your difficulties. Why the mischief didn't you do it when you had the chance—or, at least, try to do it?

"Conceited dunce that you are, I wonder that you had not more spirit than to beat such a tame retreat! But you have made your bed, and you must lie on it. I cannot, and will not, help you with a cent!

"I have written to Mrs. Standish by this post to say that I shall come up to town at once. I am a fool for my pains, but I shall just make this last effort to try if anything can be done to save you from the consequences of your folly.

"At all events, I shall let them know that you are a beggar, and likely to remain so, which will set you free from the clutches of Ada Standish who thinks you a catch, or she wouldn't have troubled her head about you.

"I had a letter from Wasp. He refuses to wait any longer for his money. You are in a nice fix, and fast breaking the heart of your disgraced and neglected.

FATHER."

Captain Wallis's letter next deserves attention:—

"Miserable and perfidious wretch," was the courteous greeting, "at last I have discovered your treachery and double-dealing, and glory in telling you that I hate and despise you! Every particle of love I ever felt for you is completely extinguished. I should be perfectly indifferent on the subject did I not feel angry with myself for having been such a fool. Don't think the plausible letters you sent to me lately imposed upon me in the least. I intuitively perceived that there was something behind—something you were concealing from me.

"You were, no doubt, very clever in your own estimation, trying to palm off upon me the story that you had gone to the Standishes' to help your precious friend to marry the heiress. You were most cautious and prudent in the cold and casual mention you made of the girls. It was this very affectation of indifference that put me on the scent. I knew they were very pretty, and great flirts, and that you—as bad as themselves—were not the sort of man to pass them by as coolly as you would your grandmother. You over-acted your part.

"I have friends at Sea Beach—true friends, on whom I can rely. I wrote to them, and have learned the truth. It surprised me. I thought that while your friend was trying to get Nora's money, you were most probably falling in love with her sister Ada (who is well-known to be a forward, unprincipled flirt); but little did I imagine your low, base duplicity and greed would lead you to betray your friend as well as me, and try to get the heiress for yourself.

"I hear you have succeeded in your ends, and all Sea Beach is talking of your good luck and approaching marriage. If it is any comfort to you to know that you have my free and hearty consent to it, you are welcome to the knowledge.

"I am very glad to be free of you. I have long felt that our engagement was a mistake. Papa showed his wisdom in insisting upon our waiting a year, until I found you out.

"All is over between us forever. Send back my letters and presents at once. I shall send your veracious epistles and gifts to any address you mention, except to the Standishes', for I am not going to have those girls amused at my expense.

"I never, even in the most sensational novel, read of a man who allowed himself to sink as low as you have done.

"I don't know what sort of a mean-spirited creature that Gerald Tracy must be not to horsewhip you soundly for your behavior—I should do so were I a man.

"Your villainy would make me despise your whole sex, were it not that the grand nobility and truthful disposition of our old friend George Digby (who is staying with us now) contrasts so favorably with your perfidious cowardice, that I am led to believe you form an exception to the general run of men—that there are few so vile.

"Don't forget to send me a bit of the wedding-cake; I may return the compliment soon.

"CLARA ROCHE."

The letter which had caused Ada's grief was something in the same style. She had crumpled it up and thrown it from her in her rage and despair:—

"ADA:—When I engaged myself to you I was quite aware of the precarious thread upon which my happiness hung. I knew you to be a consummate flirt, and I feared that when I was not near you, you could not help trying your fascinations on whatever man was by. But I believed, with all your faults, you had a true and loving heart, and that you had given that to me. Believing this, I risked my whole future happiness by loving you with a love of which your shallow nature can have no conception.

"I now know I have been cruelly mistaken in your character. Where I only apprehended harmless coquetry there has been the designing artfulness of a practiced scheming woman of the world.

"I am aware of how you have angled for and caught Gerald Tracy. You have shown your wisdom in throwing me over for him. He will be a rich man some day; I always will remain a poor one. You are to be congratulated upon your conquest; but as sure as my name's Tom Newman I'll beat the same Gerald Tracy black and blue before he's many days older.

"Do you think I am going to submit tamely to be fooled by you and him?"

"I have been told of your conduct with him on the beach last Tuesday evening. It was a pleasant thing for a fellow to hear about a girl he once thought of making his wife. I should have thought that Roland Standish's daughter would have more of the self-respect and refinement of a lady, and not allow herself to be kissed and romped with by her sweetheart before everybody, like some servant-maid out for the evening.

"But I'll pay him out for his share of it, never fear. If you have not brought him to the point, the more shame for you to be carrying on in that shameful way with him. I could never respect you again.

"Oh, Ada, you have broken my heart! I wish you had never crossed my path. You cruel, heartless girl, how could you treat me so?

"But I will not upbraid you. You have ruined my life; I don't care now what becomes of me. My only hope is that I may never see you more!

"TOM NEWMAN."

Nora's letter was a much more commonplace one, and a very pleasant, polite epistle. It was from a married cousin, and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR NORA:—

"What an age it is since I wrote to you, or heard from you! We are staying on a visit with the Vernons, and drove over to Tracy Place yesterday to see Mr. and Mrs. Loftus Tracy. My dear Nora, I was delighted to hear from them that Gerald was staying with you, and that it is as good as settled that you and he are to make a match of it. Nothing could be nicer. It is a capital way to settle the misunderstanding about Mrs. Henderson's money. He is a nice young fellow, and very handsome; I saw him when he came down to our neighborhood with his friend, Captain Wallis.

"By the way, I hear you have him staying with you, too. What do you think of him? He is engaged to Clara Roche, a dear friend of mine. They are not to be married for some time yet; and she comes over to me to get me to condole with her on her hard fate. I think it is well, for I believe he was rather fast, although Clara always fires up when I hint it, and declares he is steadiness itself.

"We dined at Maurice Blake's yesterday. Such a disagreeable evening! I always disliked her, and she seems more spiteful and cross grained than ever. I think she has some special grudge against the Tracys, for she put extra vinegar into her remarks about them. But you need not mind anything such a woman says.

"I hear from every one that Gerald is a right good fellow; and I only long to hear from yourself that it is all right, and that I may soon order my bonnet and dress for the happy event.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"MARY RUTLIDGE."

CHAPTER VI.

A FORMIDABLE ENCOUNTER.

THE first breakfast-bell rung. Nora made a step toward the bell. Her natural impulse was to order the servant to bring her breakfast up to her room. She dreaded going down-stairs; but before she rung she changed her mind, and determined not to give in to this weakness, but to go through the usual daily routine, and not allow any one to see how she suffered.

She walked over and looked into the glass, starting back with horror when she caught sight of her pallid, drawn face. The next moment she had seized a rough towel, and was vigorously rubbing her cheeks. The friction, and the indignation she felt on account of her supposed bad treatment, soon brought a bright color to her cheeks and a brilliancy to her eye. She contemplated the result with satisfaction, and bracing herself up for what lay before her, she left the room.

Seeing Ada's door closed as she passed, she thought she would get her to go down with her, and entered. Every thought of her own sorrow vanished when she saw her beloved sister in such a state of wild and despairing grief.

"Ada, darling, what can have happened?" she cried, rushing toward her and throwing her arms round her.

"Read that!" sobbed Ada, pointing to the letter which lay crushed up like a ball, a few paces off.

Nora picked it up, smoothed it out, and began to read; but at every fresh sentence her expressions of astonishment and indignation increased.

"How dared he write such a letter to you?" she exclaimed, angrily, when she came to the end. "Such a tissue of lies, from beginning to end!"

"It is true," gasped Ada.

"What! You don't know what you are saying, Ada. True that you threw him over for Gerald? That you let him kiss you on the beach in view of every one? You are raving!"

"Oh, I only wish I was! I never gave Tom up; but that abominable Gerald did kiss me when we were out the other evening, and some vile, prying sneak must have seen it and told Tom."

"I am exceedingly sorry to hear that there is some shadow of foundation for Tom's assertion; you ought never to have allowed it."

"How could I prevent it? It is all very fine for you to speak so. You are tall and stately, and men are afraid of you; but because I am so little, and can't defend myself, he seized me before I knew where I was, and kissed me. I was very angry, and told him so—odious wretch!"

"And what apology did he make to you afterward?"

"Apology, indeed! Just grinned like a baboon, and said it was no harm to kiss his cousin. Oh, I don't know what to do. It is so unkind of Tom to abuse me like this. He has broken my heart!"

"Don't cry like that, dear. I am sure it can be settled—explained. Tom had no business to write such a letter to you on mere hearsay gossip. I expected better things of him; and as far as that goes, I have no doubt he has kissed plenty of girls himself since he saw you."

"And I am quite sure he hasn't. I'd like to see him! I should hate him if I heard of such a thing. Tom suited me so well, and so few people do. I shall never care for any one else. I can't bear it!"

"You will see, it will all come right yet. Tom and you love each other, and no silly misunderstanding can separate you like that."

"No, Nora, it will never be made up. He is quite determined; and besides, what could I explain? I can't deny that that creature kissed me, and that will be enough for Tom. He was always most unreasonably jealous. It was an unlucky day for me when Gerald came here. I do wish I hadn't laid myself out to make him like me. I have got the worst of it."

"You have done nothing at all to cause any honorable man to break off his engagement with you. I shall explain it all to Tom, and if he does not see it as he ought, I shall think he is only trying to find an excuse to be set free."

"Indeed he is not. He is as true as the sun. If he knew all about it, and how we had planned to humbug those two men, he could not be angry. But I feel he is gone forever. I wish I was dead; though, indeed, Nora, if you and Captain Wallis are happy, I shall have done some good by it all."

"Don't talk of him!" cried Nora, with such a sharp ring of pain in her voice, that Ada looked up in wonder.

"What is it, Nora?" she asked, half-frightened.

"Captain Wallis is nothing to me. I have just heard from Mary Rutledge that he has been for some time engaged to her friend, Clara Roche!"

"Oh, good gracious, Nora! Did you ever hear of such villainy and daring? To come to any one's house, and act with such bare-faced impudence and deceit! I was sure he was in love with you!"

"I have been a fool myself, Ada, but it is over now. I have pride enough to keep me from grieving over it. I know you will help me through it, and say nothing."

"That I will. I feel better already at having it to do. We must punish him some way or other."

"Don't let us talk of that again; we settled to do it before we saw them, and look what trouble it has brought upon us! Women are no match for men in that sort of thing."

"I should hope not, indeed! Men are all wretches! I hate them!"

"You won't say so when you and Tom make

up. I must go down now. I wish you could have been with me to back me up; but you are too great an object to appear. I shall say you have a headache."

"No, Nora; hay-fever, please. Look at my nose and eyes, all red and swollen. It must be hay-fever."

"Very well; I shall send you up your breakfast. Try to eat something."

"You are a brave darling," exclaimed Ada, throwing her arms round her sister's neck. "You have trouble enough of your own to break your heart, and you can comfort me, and never think of yourself!"

This tenderness almost made Nora break down. For a moment she was silent, then said, in a choked voice, "I must not give way. I cannot trust myself to speak of it;" and she ran out of the room.

"The fat's in the fire," remarked Gerald to Captain Wallis, as he found himself alone with him in the breakfast room. "The governor will be here to-day. The game is up, and we had better decamp."

A hollow groan was the only reply.

"What in Jupiter is the matter with you?" exclaimed Gerald, looking at Captain Wallis with astonishment. "Surely your flirtation with Ada has not hit you so hard that you need to groan at having to stop it?"

"To the mischief with all flirtation!" responded Captain Wallis, viciously. "I was a fool to allow myself to be drawn into this. I have got the worst of it." Read that"—and he handed him Clara's letter.

Gerald perused it, emitting, as he did so, several low whistles and sounds of disgust. As he handed it back he observed, "By Jove! the ladies nowadays can give it a fellow in pretty good style! Between Miss Roche's choice epithets for you, and Nora's for me, we ought to have a rather small opinion of ourselves. But the whole thing can be easily explained."

"Can it, indeed? It's little you know Clara's jealousy; and, besides, I don't believe she wants me. There's that beast, Digby, staying there. He has always been spooning after her, and now she will take him."

"If she can act like that, you are well rid of her."

"Well rid of her! There's not a girl in the Union fit to hold a candle to her; and if she throws me over, I will go to the bad as fast as I can."

"Join me, then; I'm bound for the same destination. I dare say by this day month I shall be a steerage passenger on board some vessel bound for Australia."

The bitter tone and haggard face of his friend struck Captain Wallis keenly.

"Gerald, my poor fellow," he said, holding out his hand, "don't be a fool. You love this girl and she loves you. What madness possesses you to put such luck from you, and go to perdition?"

"I cannot break my word. I have sworn never to ask her to marry me, and I won't. Even if I did, and she knew who I really was, she would spurn me."

"Take advice. Try whether she will or not."

"Never! Hush!—here come the old people."

Mr. and Mrs. Standish, lively and happy as usual, entered the room, greeted the young men cheerily, and expressed surprise that the girls were not down.

Nora appeared a few minutes later, looking the picture of blooming health and good spirits.

She announced that Ada was suffering from hay-fever, and wished her breakfast sent up to her room.

"Hay-fever!" exclaimed Mrs. Standish, in dismay. "Poor child! I never heard of such a thing. It is very strange, too, for she has always lived near hay-fields, and never had the fever before."

Nora rattled on with a vivacity and recklessness very unlike her usual manner.

Her gayety jarred upon Gerald, who felt utterly miserable, and yearned for some sympathetic response from her.

Nora noticed it all, but attributed his gloom to some hitch in the course of his love affair, and felt the more hardened against him.

"Your father will be here to-day," observed Mrs. Standish, smiling blandly at Captain Wallis.

He stared at her, being too much occupied with his own thoughts at the moment to think of his role.

Gerald gave him a warning look, which brought him back to his senses.

"Yes; so I heard from him this morning," he stammered. "I shall run up to town and meet him."

"I regret that we must bring our delightful visit to a close," observed Gerald. "I have received a letter to-day which obliges me to leave town at once."

"Oh, dear, that is too bad!" exclaimed Mrs. Standish.

And she and her husband were loud in hospitable regrets.

Gerald looked steadily at Nora.

She did not change a muscle; but remarked, with a placid smile and voice:

"It is too bad of you to run away so abruptly, Captain Wallis. What shall we do without you at the tennis match this afternoon?"

Gerald bit his lip with mortification.

He replied bitterly:

"Unfortunately, I must sacrifice my pleasures and inclinations to far more serious and painful matters. You may remember I mentioned some of my plans to you the other evening."

"Oh, so you did!" exclaimed Nora, with a merry laugh. "We both got very tragical over it, too. I suppose it was the effects of the romantic time and scene."

Gerald could stand it no longer. He abruptly left the table, and stepped out on the lawn.

Captain Wallis looked at Nora in amazement. He could not understand this new change of scene in the comedy they had been going through. It seemed fast turning to a tragedy.

Gerald and Captain Wallis had settled to go up to town that afternoon on pretense of meeting Mr. Tracy, and so make their escape before the exposure came; but he, after posting his letter, bethought himself that the sooner he pounced upon the culprits the better, and the less chance they would have of being able to outwit him.

He therefore came to Sea Beach by the morning train, and was just walking up the avenue of Aspell House as Ada Standish was starting off for a solitary walk to try and recover her looks and composure.

She had thought over the whole matter, and comfortably shelving the question of her own coquetry, had arrived at the conclusion that her cousin Gerald was the cause of all her trouble, and that she hated him and everything connected with him. She was, therefore, in anything but an amiable frame of mind when she came face to face with the indignant father.

He guessed at once who it was. She was so unlike the descriptions he had heard of Nora.

He determined to have it out with her there and then.

"Miss Ada Standish, I presume?" he said, raising his hat. "Allow me to introduce myself—Mr. Loftus Tracy."

Ada responded with a most frigid bow, and looked at him with great disfavor.

It need scarcely be said that he was not more amiably disposed toward her.

They stood eying each other like two highly-charged batteries, only wanting a spark to set them off.

As she did not seem disposed to speak, Mr. Tracy was obliged to begin.

"I have come up to see my son on rather

unpleasant business!" he remarked sternly. "If you have a few moments to spare, I should be glad of a little conversation with you."

"I was only going for a quiet walk," replied Ada, with lofty indifference. "I suppose a few moments cannot make much difference one way or the other, though I cannot, for the life of me, think why you should honor me with any conversation concerning your son."

This was said in such an ungracious tone and manner that Mr. Tracy at once concluded that Gerald had communicated to Ada the contents of his letter, and that she was prepared to do battle.

"From what I have heard, Miss Ada, you ought to be particularly interested in anything that concerns my son," he remarked, sarcastically. "No doubt he made you aware of the contents of the letter he received from me this morning?"

"I know nothing whatever about him or his letters, and care less."

"You don't seem particularly amiable this morning, miss."

"No, I am not in the least so; perhaps you had better defer your conversation, if it is like this."

"No, madam, I will not defer it. I know the cause of your rude conduct to me. You guess I am come to put a stop to the little game between you and my son Gerald; but perhaps when you know that he is a beggar, and likely to remain so, you won't be so anxious to marry him!"

Mr. Loftus Tracy was not quite prepared for the outburst of fury which followed his words. Ada stamped her foot and ground her teeth, and for a moment was too enraged to be able to reply.

"Anxious to marry your son!" she cried, shrilly. "That's too good! I would not condescend to take him if there was not another man in the United States. I hate the sight of him, and you, too!"

"Hoity, toity, young lady!—there would not be much condescension in your marrying the future head of the Tracys. That sort of talk won't go down with me. I am quite aware that you and he have been carrying on a pretty brisk flirtation since he came here. I suppose you will deny that?"

"No, I won't. Before ever I saw him I set myself out to flirt with him, and make him run after me, and I succeeded."

"You acknowledge that?" exclaimed the irate father, aghast.

"Yes, I do. And now what have you say to me?"

"It is a most charming and modest avowal for a young lady to make! As you wouldn't have him at any price, might I ask your object in making this dead set at him?"

"I haven't the slightest objection in telling it to you. You disgracefully sent your precious son here to try and get my sister's money to pay his debts with. We were, fortunately, warned in time, and determined that he should not succeed in his base schemes. I took him in hand, and Nora was saved from his persecution."

It was now Mr. Tracy's turn to grow furious. He sincerely wished this audacious little flirt was a boy or a man, that he could thrash her as she deserved, or even use the freedom of speech she merited. He was half-afraid to trust himself to speak. Then, instead of the abusive, he assumed the sarcastic mode of address.

"You and your sister must be most charming young persons!" he observed, with a smile and a bow. "Be perfectly assured that, had I known of your moral excellence and delicate refinement, I would sooner have sent my son to find a wife among the Zulus than here!"

"Oh, no, dear Mr. Tracy, you wouldn't. You forget the Zulus wouldn't have had the money you wanted. If they had, of course I know you don't mind anything else."

"You are an exceedingly pert girl, and I

believe your impertinence and all this story is just to cover your own defeat."

"So natural that you should think so! You could never fancy that, when you were holding out all sorts of threats to your promising heir, until you got him to consent 'to go and have a look' at Nora, that some one heard the whole scene, and warned us? You have been most splendidly outwitted!"

"I am not accustomed to hear young ladies speak thus; but it is quite in keeping with the rest of your behavior! If you had a million, I would not let my son marry you!"

Ada's ironical laugh rung out loud and clear.

"It is well for you that you wear petticoats!" roared Mr. Tracy, shaking his stick at her. "You take advantage of my inability to chastise you as you deserve! Men have but to submit to the scourge of a woman's tongue."

"I don't see much submission, but I can well fancy how mad you must be at not getting Nora's money into your clutches! It is enough to put you out! I excuse you!"

"You excuse me, indeed! Then I don't excuse you! You have acted in a most forward, unladylike, and artful manner! No gentleman worthy of the name would choose you for his wife if he knew what you really were!"

Now this hit a vulnerable part in Ada's armor.

It was too like what she had heard from Tom Newman that morning not to wound her. However, she was not going to let her adversary see the advantage he had got over her. She covered her mortification with a show of temper.

"You are a rude old wretch," she exclaimed, "and a great deal worse than even what I heard you were! I shall not stay one moment longer to be the object of your ill-tempered violence!"

And with these words she sailed off in great dignity.

"Little spitfire!" ejaculated the outraged man as he watched her retreat. "What the mischief should we have done if Gerald married her! It would have been like letting off an infernal machine! I'll go up to the house now, and see what that ass has to say for himself! A pretty mess he has made of the business! But if those two imps put their heads together to outwit him, he hadn't a fair chance at starting!"

As long as Ada felt there was a possibility of her being seen, she retreated with flying colors; but as soon as she got away among the sheltering rocks, she flung herself down, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

Captain Wallis had also gone out for a solitary walk, to think over his wrongs, and the best plan to bring Clara Roche to her senses. And Ada had not been very long in her resting-place when he came in sight of her. His first impulse was to avoid her. He considered her the cause of all his troubles, and was in no mood to keep up their usual flirtation; but a second glance toward her convinced him that the girl was either ill or in some trouble. With a man's generosity, he at once pitied her, and advanced to offer her help.

"What is the matter, Ada?" he asked, in a kind voice.

She looked up at his approach, and he was shocked to see the grief depicted on the little face, which he never before had seen except sparkling with mirth and mischief.

Ada had felt very angry with him, and determined to treat him with the same severity and scorn she had shown to his supposed father, but he spoke so kindly and looked so sad himself, that her heart melted, and all her resolves vanished.

There was no doubt about it. These two had become very fond of each other in a frank, cousinly sort of way.

"You have got me into such trouble!" she said, between her sobs.

Captain Wallis opened his eyes in amazement.

"What possible trouble can I have got you into?" he exclaimed.

"You have destroyed all my future happiness and nearly killed me!" was the despairing response.

Captain Wallis was thunderstruck. "Could it be possible that this little coquette had fallen in love with him?" he asked himself.

"I wish you would explain, Ada," he said, very seriously.

"You know the other evening when you behaved so rudely and kissed me? Well, some horrible wretch was prying about and saw you, and wrote and told Tom; and my heart is broken!"

In spite of his gloomy out-look, Captain Wallis could with difficulty refrain from laughing out at this intelligence. After all, he was not the only one to get his fingers burnt in this little game.

"Who is Tom?" he asked, with apparent innocence.

"Tom is Tom Newman; and I am engaged to him."

"Oh!" said Captain Wallis, prolonging the sound, as if in astonishment. "And so you have been engaged all this time?"

"Yes, I have!" answered Ada, defiantly.

"And do you think your conduct has been such as exactly becomes an engaged young lady?" demanded he.

"I had a reason for it," stammered Ada, feeling rather ashamed of herself. "I did all for the best; but I have lost everything through you. I wish you had never come near me!"

And she began to cry again.

"I don't think my coming near you would have led to much mischief if you had not laid yourself out to make me fall in love with you."

"How dare you say I did that?"

"Do you deny it?"

"I wouldn't condescend to deny it. You have not suffered in any way, so you need not mind."

"Excuse me, I have suffered deeply and severely."

"Oh, don't begin to talk that sort of rubbish now—I am in no humor for it; and don't imagine that I was such a fool as to believe a word that you said. I saw all along that you were only amusing yourself with me."

"That showed great penetration on your part. Nevertheless, leaving all 'rubbish' aside, you have got me into a fearful mess; for I, too, happened to be engaged, and the young lady has thrown me off, hearing I had deserted her for you."

"That's too absurd!" cried Ada, with a hearty laugh, her merry nature seizing at once the ludicrous aspect of the affair.

"It is not at all ludicrous to me," said Captain Wallis, dolefully. "It threatens my future happiness quite as much as your lover's conduct does yours. What are we to do?"

"If it weren't that you kissed me, I could explain my whole conduct to Tom; and he would see that I had done nothing wrong."

"I think you owe me an explanation, too."

"Why, I should like to know?"

"For doing your best to make a fool of me. A nice fix I should be in now if I hadn't been engaged before I saw you; and, also, if we hadn't heard of your plans."

"Heard of my plans!—what can you mean?" asked Ada, with crimson cheeks.

"As the game is played out, and you will probably never see me again after to-day, I may as well make a clean breast of it. You remember the day you and your sister sat on the beach talking over Mrs. Blake's letter?"

Ada could not answer. Her eyes opened to twice their ordinary size with astonishment and dismay.

"You don't answer, but I see you do remember. You both abused us pretty freely that day, and concocted a nice little plan to punish our supposed wickedness."

"How do you know all this? Oh, do tell me that before you say another word!" cried Ada, eagerly.

"Well, under the protection of our guardian angel, my friend and I were led to the spot, and were actually lying on the sand a few feet from where you were talking, and I heard every word."

"You miserable creatures!" cried Ada, with all her usual vehemence. "How could you have been so mean and dishonorable? Oh, if I had only known you were there!"

"Well, you see, you didn't. As to being mean and dishonorable, in the first place, we could not get away; in the next, 'all is fair in love or war,' and this was both combined."

"Oh, dear! I never heard anything so horrible as this! Your guardian angel, indeed! I think it more likely you were under the protection of his Satanic Majesty!"

"That's a matter of opinion, but you haven't heard the pith of the matter yet. As soon as you were gone, we gave vent to our feelings, and arranged a plan for paying you back in your own coin."

"Paying us back, indeed! I wonder how. I suppose you thought we should fall violently in love with you both?"

"Not at all; that would have been very inconvenient—at least, as far as I was concerned; but I had no objection to a tilting-match, and I must confess that I have grown very fond of you during the course of it—fond, in a frank, straightforward way, you know."

"I got to like you, too, better than I ever expected I should. I suppose your being my cousin had something to do with it?"

"Yes; but I am not your cousin at all."

"Not my cousin! I cannot understand you. Surely, Gerald, you must be my cousin?"

"I am not Gerald at all."

There was a pause. Ada fixed her eyes piercingly on her companion, and thought it over.

"Oh, you double-dyed deceitful pair!" she exclaimed, starting up. "I see it all; you are that Captain Wallis."

"At your service," he replied, making a low bow.

"I can't express what I feel," continued Ada. "The whole thing, from beginning to end, is nothing but tangle and stories. I don't know how you can justify such conduct."

"By your own. You would have pretended to be your sister, if you could. We took the idea from you. It was 'Diamond Cut Diamond,' only I don't know where the victory lies. We are all more or less hit. You are left in the lurch by Tom; I am repudiated by Clara; Gerald is in love with your sister, but has made a vow never to ask her to marry him. I don't know about her feelings. Until this morning I could have sworn she liked him; but now I am quite at sea."

"Nora thought Gerald was you, and heard this morning that you were engaged to Miss Roche. Of course she would pretend not to care for him then."

"That's capital. Each new step in this affair is more absurd than the last. May I conclude that if this supposed engagement had not been made known she would have returned his affection?"

"Well, I don't know. You see, when she knows he is Gerald, she will remember all the horrible things he said of her, and how he only wanted her money."

"Now, Ada, answer me truly; do you believe that Gerald and I are the scoundrels that wretched old woman would have led you to believe?"

"Why should she have said it, then?"

"To gratify her feminine spite. Gerald told his father that not for all the money in the world would he have such a sour-faced old tabby sitting opposite him every day as this Mrs. Blake. She was listening."

"No wonder she hated him! I begin to understand things now. I should like Gerald and Nora to marry each other, if he were not such a monster as we thought."

"He certainly adores her. If he will give up his high-handed idea of not asking her, all may come right."

"Let us go up to the house before that meddling old Tracy has spoiled everything. I am sure when Nora knows that Gerald is not you, or you not Gerald, and that he is not engaged, she will be so delighted that she will agree to everything."

"Come along then. I think as we have got along so well as cousins, we had better remain so to the last."

"You have behaved most shamefully; but I could laugh at the whole thing if it were not for Tom's cruelty."

"Oh, I'll make that all right. Don't begin to cry again. I only wish I was as sure of getting well out of my scrape with Clara. By the way, how did you know Mr. Tracy was here?"

"Didn't I meet him on the avenue? He attacked me about trying to catch his son. You may fancy that I was not in a frame of mind to receive his impudence. We had a battle royal; but I think I got the best of it. He was speechless with rage."

Captain Wallis laughed loud and long as he pictured this engagement, and they both turned in the direction of the house.

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE AGAINST PRIDE.

ADA STANDISH and Captain Wallis had been so engrossed in their explanations that they had not noticed two gentlemen who were standing near, and evidently looking at them and talking of them.

Their conversation was animated, and at last the shorter of the two broke away from his companion, as if in great excitement, and made a few steps forward. The latter followed, and taking him by the arm, said, persuasively: "Now, Tom, recollect you must be calm and firm. You will give them an advantage if you get excited."

"No fear of my being excited," cried Tom, in a voice shaking with suppressed fury. "No fear of my losing my self-control. I'm perfectly cool."

The Mentor walked away, and Tom, with strides which increased in length and speed every moment, came toward Ada and Captain Wallis, and stood still before them.

"Mr. Gerald Tracy, I presume?" he remarked, raising his hat with lofty politeness, and ignoring Ada.

Captain Wallis looked bewildered, but Ada's exclamation of "Oh, Tom!" enlightened him at once.

"I think, Miss Standish, it would be as well if you retired," observed the dignified Tom. "My business with this gentleman is not exactly such as you would care to assist in."

Captain Wallis had been silent so far, feeling utterly unable to speak without laughing, and knowing that if he did so he would ruffle the enraged lover's dignity beyond all power of soothing.

"I think, sir, you are laboring under some strange mistake," he remarked now. "My name is not Tracy."

Tom was taken aback.

"Not Tracy!" he stammered.

Captain Wallis drew his card-case from his pocket, and gravely handed his card to Tom, who became more and more bewildered as he read the name.

Ada saw her advantage, and seized it.

"Now, Tom, I hope you feel ashamed of yourself," she said, saucily, "and see how you have let yourself be deceived by slander and gossip. What is your business with Captain Wallis?"

Tom's business was to thrash the man who had kissed Ada; but as he did not exactly know how to ask the gallant captain if he had so transgressed, he was silent.

"I am quite at your disposal," observed Captain Wallis, smiling blandly. "I hope you will soon explain what you wish."

"There has been some mistake," said Tom; but for all that, you seem to be the person I want. Perhaps you are not aware that that lady was engaged to me?"

"On the contrary, I was aware of the interesting fact before I had the pleasure of making her acquaintance."

"Now, Mr. Tom, what do you say to that?" demanded Ada.

"I hardly know what to say," admitted Tom; "but you know what I heard about you the other evening, Ada. Is that true, or is it not, and is this the gentleman you were with?"

"I must answer for Miss Standish," said Captain Wallis, more seriously. "And I think, Mr. Newman, when you know all the ins and outs of the absurd farce we have all been mixed up in the last month or so, you will be quite satisfied that Miss Standish has done nothing to forfeit your love or respect."

"I wish I could be sure of that," said Tom, ruefully.

"You have behaved in such a manner that I should never speak to you again!" cried Ada, indignantly. "You accused me of throwing you over for my cousin Gerald because he was a better catch. You find out that that is false, and you do not apologize!"

"I shall not apologize until I am satisfied about the rest of what I heard," replied Tom, doggedly.

"Come, Mr. Newman," said Captain Wallis, laying his hand on Tom's shoulder, "let us clear up this absurd storm in a tea-cup at once. Now, what did you hear? Out with it!"

"That I was engaged to Gerald, and kissed him on the beach before every one!" put in Ada, in scornful tones.

"Well, you see, there is not a shadow of truth in that, for she is engaged to no one but you, and it was I who kissed her on the beach last Tuesday evening."

"You!—and you dare to stand there and tell me so? You shall pay dearly for it! Do you think I will keep my engagement with a girl who acts in that disgraceful manner?"

"You make a mistake in threatening her," said Captain Wallis, with a strange gleam in his eyes. "I need scarcely remark that neither fear of you or any one else could influence my conduct one way or another. I surprised her, and paid dearly for my presumption."

"Of course you say so," sneered Tom; "but what explanation have you to give for your daring to take such a liberty?"

"None whatever. It is not the first time I have snatched a kiss from a pretty girl, and, please the Fates, it won't be the last."

"Do that as you like; but the girl sha'n't be my wife."

"Well, if she has any spirit, I don't think she will after your treatment of her. I should like to know what she has done that she could have avoided?"

"She could have kept you at a proper distance if she had wished to."

"Could she, indeed? I am sorry for your experience if you think that; but doubtless you are far too immaculate to dream of such a thing as kissing a pretty girl without asking her permission."

"I am not in the least immaculate," exclaims Tom, stung deeply at such a supposition; "but if you were engaged, you would know that a fellow does not like the young lady to carry on like that."

"As it happens, I am engaged, and have been for some time; and I have no objections whatever to my *fiancé* carrying on any little harmless flirtation she likes, provided I am not there to feel slighted by it."

"You see, you haven't an excuse left," observed Ada, composedly. "You accused me of making up to Gerald. You find that is false. Now you know I could not prevent Captain Wallis kissing me, and as to your abusing him for that, pretending to be shocked at my impudence, you are a regular hypocrite; for men are all the same, and you are as bad, or worse than most!"

Captain Wallis laughed, and a faint smile broke out on Tom's face.

"I had heard such a different story," he began.

"And you would believe any story telling

gossip before me?" asked Ada, raising her lovely eyes reproachfully.

Tom was fast relenting. "Lane is most particular about anything he states," he muttered.

"So it was Mr. Lane that told his tales?" said Ada, between her teeth. And she there and then registered a vow to make the house too hot or too cold for that gentleman, should he ever come to pay his visit, when she was married—a vow, we may remark, she kept most religiously.

"I think I had better leave you two to settle it between you," observed Captain Wallis, with a knowing smile. "I shall smoke my cigar at the end of the road; you can join me when you like. Recollect; we must not be too late going up to the house." And he walked off, in spite of the assurances from Tom and Ada that "there was not the slightest occasion."

Needless to say that before ten minutes had elapsed, Ada had Tom as firmly in her power as ever, and deeply repentant for his base suspicions and the pain he had caused her. And when she told him the whole affair from beginning to end, with all its absurd misunderstandings and complications, Tom's roars of hearty laughter nearly reached Captain Wallis and also his sedate friend, Mr. Lane, who could not believe his ears until he came near enough to see Tom and Ada in amicable converse; when, with a look of deep disgust at Tom's folly and weakness, he walked off and left him to his fate.

Loftus Tracy did not immediately go up to the house. His encounter with Ada had excited him so much, that he did not feel at all fit to make his appearance before the Standishes. He walked up and down to recover his composure, and to think over what was to be done with Gerald, since his matrimonial scheme had so completely failed.

Gerald had spent his morning wandering about in the vain hope of meeting Nora, and giving himself one more chance of finding out her sentiments toward him.

Nora had been watching him all the time, and took good care to keep out of his way; and when she did at last appear, was accompanied by her father and mother.

"Where have you been all the morning, Captain Wallis?" asked Mrs. Standish. "My husband was wondering what had become of you."

"I had several things to pack and arrange," replied Gerald, "and have been kept pretty busy getting ready to start."

"We are all very sorry to lose you, Wallis," said Mr. Standish. "You and Gerald have kept the house alive. Perhaps you can come to us later on, when you have settled your business?"

"There is not the slightest hope of that," replied Gerald, moodily. "I have a good deal of disagreeable work before me, but I shall always look back to my stay here as one of the happiest periods of my life." He looked at Nora; she did not appear even to have heard him.

"Papa, you never thought of telling James to mow the tennis-ground," she exclaimed, as if that subject alone had occupied her mind.

Gerald turned away that she might not see the expression of his face, and in doing so found himself within a few paces of his father. It must be confessed that his first impulse was to take to his heels and get away from the place as quickly as he could. But since Nora's extraordinary change of conduct, a feeling of defiant recklessness had taken possession of him; he decided to let matters take their course, since nothing could make him more miserable and hopeless than he was.

"Why, here is Loftus!" exclaimed Mrs. Standish, advancing to meet her relative.

"We did not expect you until evening. I think Gerald has gone into town to meet you."

"Eh?" said Mr. Tracy, in astonishment; but thinking he had not rightly heard what Mrs. Standish said, he paid no further attention to it. "I had pressing business in town," he said,

"and thought it better to come up at once and get it over. Miss Nora, I presume?"

He had shaken hands all round while speaking, bestowing a private paternal scowl on Gerald, *en passant*. He thought Nora looked very haughty and cold, but she was much more to his taste than her pert and flippant sister.

"You have brought out your baggage and will stay with us, of course?" said Mr. Standish.

"I am sorry I cannot. I have only a day to spare, and have some things to arrange—connected with this son of mine," he could not help adding, with an ominous glance at Gerald.

"That son of yours!" echoed Mrs. Standish. "Have you adopted Captain Wallis as your son?"

"Captain Wallis!" exclaimed Mr. Tracy, in astonishment.

"I must tell you, Mr. and Mrs. Standish," said Gerald, holding himself very straight, and looking very proud and handsome, as Nora thought, "that Captain Wallis and I have been guilty of a great piece of impertinence toward you. He took my name, and I his. Perhaps, when you know our reasons, you may forgive us both."

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Standish; after which pious expression there was silence. Mrs. Standish could not collect her ideas sufficiently to realize the whole affair; but when she and her husband had stared helplessly at each other for a few moments, they seemed to see the prospect of a good joke, and broke out into their usual beaming smiles.

Loftus Tracy's brow cleared. He began to think that his son had shown more of the wisdom of the serpent than he had given him credit for, and that his doings had not been so bad, after all.

Nora changed from pale to red, and from red to pale, and could with difficulty prevent the signs of her agitation being seen. She felt angry at having been so duped—so tricked into being civil and finally loving this cousin, to whom she owed such scorn and contempt; but above all feeling of anger rose a wild joy, which would not be controlled, that this was not the engaged Captain Wallis, but a man free to woo her, and who certainly loved her. While these conflicting emotions raged in her breast, she assumed a very proud and defiant look, and said, in chilling tones, "Might we venture to ask what object you and your friend had in carrying out this absurd masquerading?"

"Certainly," replied Gerald, meeting her look with one quite as lofty and cold. "We accidentally overheard you and your sister discussing the charming and veracious epistle which you received from Mrs. Maurice Blake. I need not repeat the opprobrious epithets you lavished on me, or the baseness of which you believed me guilty, without a shadow of proof. I expect you remember all that. I shall never forget it. We also heard the plan you and Ada arranged to punish us, and agreed that the best way to defeat it was to pass for each other during our visit."

Nora flushed crimson as she heard that these two young men had overheard her conversation, and that her words still rankled in Gerald's breast.

She was ashamed of it now; but, for all that, he was the man who had come to try and get her money, and she was bound not to surrender.

"I am still at a loss to see the object of your very questionable behavior!" she remarked, scornfully.

"There was not much of an object to be gained either way," answered Gerald, maintaining as cool an appearance as her own. "We first thought of not coming here at all; but I had a fancy to prove to you that I was not the monster you were led to believe. I knew you would not let me have a chance if I appeared before you as the fortune-hunter. I therefore presented myself to you as Captain Wallis, in which character I have enjoyed some happy hours, which most assuredly would not have been accorded to Gerald Tracy."

"Say no more about it, my boy!" exclaimed Mr. Standish, clapping him on the shoulder. "I don't half understand it, but no doubt you young people do. We liked you for yourself, and are the more pleased to find you are Gerald after all."

"The very first night you came we said we liked you best," put in Mrs. Standish, "and said we were sorry you were not Gerald Tracy; but we think Captain Wallis very nice, too. I am sure now you need not run away, and we shall all get on very happily. You and your friend need not think that we are angry with you for playing a trick to pay out those saucy girls."

"I don't understand what you said about Mrs. Maurice Blake," remarked Mr. Tracy.

"That charming female did us the honor of hiding and listening to our interview at Tracy Park," replied Gerald, bitterly. "We were both very angry, and said many foolish things we did not mean. These she has twisted and embellished so artfully with falsehoods, that I figure as a villain of the blackest dye."

"Why the deuce did she do that?" cried his father. "We have always been on very good terms."

"You forget her name was brought into the conversation, and I spoke of her as a sour-faced old tabby, whom Maurice had married for her money."

"You could not expect a woman to forgive that," said Mr. Standish.

All but Gerald and Nora laughed at it as a very good joke.

"So you are all here, settling the affairs of the nation," cried a merry voice, and Ada appeared on the scene, followed by Tom Newman and Captain Wallis.

"I conclude you have been informed of the unheard of impudence of those two schemers," continued Ada, with a wave of her hand in the direction of the culprits. "How are we ever to get on with them, or talk to them without mixing them up together, I can't imagine."

"You appear to be in a very different mood now, young lady, to what you were when I met you," remarked Mr. Tracy, dryly.

"I am, thank you, quite different," replied Ada, nodding frankly at her former antagonist. "I even feel quite amiable toward you, now that I know it was not your son I was accused of running after."

"You would have kept him well under your thumb if you had got him," remarked the other, grimly.

"He ought to be accustomed to that," was the retort. "You see, as I was already provided, I did not want him. I hope you feel ashamed of all you said to me."

"Don't mind her, Loftus; she is a spoiled child," said Mrs. Standish.

But Loftus was quite ready to hold out the olive branch, and make his peace with Ada, now that he felt sure of his hopes being fulfilled with regard to Nora and his son Gerald.

In the midst of the explanations and laughter that followed, Nora quietly left the group, and turned down a side walk.

Gerald followed her. No one passed any remark, but an exchange of meaning glances went round, and all congratulated them selves on the happy termination of the intricate affair.

"I wish to have a few words with you, Nora, before I leave," said Gerald, when he came up with her.

He looked very stern, and had braced himself for the part he had to go through.

Nora had recalled to her mind all his slighting remarks made about her, as detailed by Mrs. Blake. She had summoned all her pride to help her to conquer the weakness she felt for one who had so wounded her self-respect.

"What more can you have to say?" she asked, as if weary of the whole thing.

"Not very much," replied Gerald, coldly; "however, that little had better be said. I am fool enough to wish for your good opinion—to know that you don't think me the miser-

able scoundrel I was represented to you to be. Do you believe, Nora, I am what Mrs. Blake depicted me?"

"Did you or did you not use those expressions about me and my money which she wrote?" asked Nora, looking at him very fixedly. "Did you say I had wheedled your aunt out of her money; that you detested me; but that if you could at all bring yourself to marry me, you would go through with the sacrifice, to use my fortune to pay your debts, as you were between Scylla and Charybdis?"

"All I said has been so twisted and colored as to give it quite another meaning. I was goaded to madness by my father's taunts, and said much which I did not mean, and of which I am thoroughly ashamed."

"Then you did say all this?" cried Nora, bitterly.

"No, not all, but much, for which I now apologize, and ask your forgiveness."

"You judged rightly in thinking that I should show you neither friendship nor civility had I known who you were," continued Nora, with flashing eyes. "It was quite in keeping with the rest of your conduct, to try to trick me into liking you under a false name; but you did not succeed in gaining your ends."

"There need be no question of liking or disliking between us now, Nora," said Gerald, sadly. "Neither had I any end to gain, except to clear myself in your eyes. When I heard you credit me with the basest and most dishonorable of motives, without a shadow of proof; pronounce me guilty of the worst crimes, without giving me a chance to clear myself; when I listened to the abuse you heaped upon me, and heard the loathing you expressed for a perfectly innocent man, whom you had never even seen; I swore to make you change your opinion, to justify myself to you; but I also swore I would never ask so hard and unjust a woman to be my wife. I have kept both these oaths."

"Thank you for your politeness and candor; and let me tell you, in return, that had you asked me a thousand times, and had I known who you were, nothing on earth would have induced me to accept a man capable of speaking of any woman as you did of me. Hard and unjust, indeed! I wonder what words I could find to describe your treatment of me! I only wish I had never seen you."

"I most heartily echo your wish. I have suffered pretty well, but I have gained my purpose. I don't care what you say. You could not have looked at me and spoken to me as you have often done had you not liked me. You do not, in your heart, think me the wretch you pretend to."

"You do well to taunt me with my weakness and folly. It is generous and worthy of you. But, thank goodness! fool as I have been, I have pride and strength enough to crush out any feeling I had for you. I will never forgive what you said."

"Nor I you what you said of me. I have plainly told you I am here merely to apologize for anything rude or ungentlemanly I may have said. Beyond that I have nothing to say but to take my leave of you forever."

"I accept your apology, and hope you will profit by this lesson, and be more successful in your next matrimonial venture, and soon meet with some one with a sufficiently large fortune to pay your debts. Good-by!"

With elaborate politeness these two young people bowed low to each other, and walked off in opposite directions, models of outraged dignity and proud determination.

Gerald gave Tim orders to bring his things to the train, and then left the house without taking leave of any one.

Nora took refuge in her room, where she relieved herself by a passionate fit of crying.

Ada, entering some time after, was horrified to find her in such a condition, and furious when she learned the result of the interview between her sister and Gerald.

She scolded her soundly, and declared they

were a pair of obstinate fools, who deserved to be whipped with nettles for throwing away their happiness without any cause.

The other members of the family were equally grieved and disappointed.

Mr. Tracy was both angry and uneasy. He could not understand where Gerald had gone, and felt sorry he had been so harsh with him, and led him to think he would not help him. He felt particularly angry with Nora for treating his son so badly.

The Standishes persuaded him to stay that night with them, in order to see if Gerald would either come back or write.

Nora kept her room.

Tom and Ada were devoted to each other; and Captain Wallis started off to make his peace with Clara Roche, in which he was perfectly successful.

And so the day passed; and the night closed this little scene of various happiness and misery, anger, hopes, and fears.

CHAPTER V. II.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

GERALD TRACY determined to give up everything, and leave the country at once. He would run down to Tracy Park by the afternoon train, make his necessary arrangements, say good-by to his mother, and be off by the next train West.

Since Nora Standish had treated him so hardly, and there was no possibility of ever winning her for his wife, he felt no interest or pleasure in anything; and his only wish was to get away as far as he could from all his former surroundings and associations, and try to forget the past in a new country and a new life, the harder and more disagreeable the better.

He sent his man Trim back to Sea Beach with a letter to his father, telling him of the course he intended to pursue; and ended by saying that, in a few days, he hoped to put the sea between him and his troubles and difficulties.

In the same reckless mood he boarded the train which was to take him out to his home, and sinking into a seat gave himself up to gloomy reveries which were only broken into by the trains arriving at the little station nearest to Tracy Park. Hastily rushing from the car he tripped, no one knew how, and the next moment was flung headlong to the ground just as the train was beginning to move.

A brakeman seeing the accident rushed to the rescue and pulled him out from between the cars and away from what at the next moment would have been a most horrible death, but his leg was broken and he had fainted from the pain and shock. A carriage was quickly procured and kindly and tender hands lifted him gently into it and he was conveyed to his home.

The physician who attended him was of the opinion that he had received internal injuries, which might prove most serious if he succumbed to the mental distress under which he seemed to be laboring.

Poor Mrs. Tracy sat by her son's bedside during the night, and wept bitterly as she listened to the sad words he uttered in his ravings. He implored Nora to forgive him, and to believe him sincere: to at least say good-by to a ruined and desperate man.

Then he bemoaned his debts and difficulties, and suggested wild and impossible plans for extricating himself. At fitful moments, recognizing his mother, he reproachfully asked her if she wished to banish him too.

She tried to soothe him, and told him over and over again that she and his father would make it all right for him, and that he was not to fret himself; but he lay, tossing about, and going over all the incidents of the past week; and Mrs. Tracy rightly conjectured that he had met with hard treatment at Sea Beach, and that unless he could be kept from brooding

over it, it would militate seriously against his recovery.

Early the next morning his father received a telegram. He sat like one stunned when he read it; for, strange to say, this irascible old gentleman dearly loved his children; and, while he made their life miserable about any trifle they asked for, would in reality gladly have laid down his own to save them from want or danger.

The news flew from one to the other of the Standish household. Many and loud were the expressions of grief at harm befalling one whom they all liked; but though they talked it over to each other, all shrunk from intruding upon the sacred grief of the stricken father. He sat motionless, and seemingly insensible to everything, while the fatal telegram lay open on his knee.

After a while, he became conscious of some one near him, who took up the telegram. He roused himself to shake off this stupor of despair; and as he rose to his feet, he saw that it was Nora Standish who was beside him. Her face was white as death, and the expression of anguish depicted on it as she read might have moved any one to pity. But the sight of her produced exactly the opposite effect on the grief-stricken father.

It brought him back at once to consciousness, and his passion broke out against the one he looked upon as the cause of all.

"Ah, read that!" he hissed, as he watched her. "I hope you are satisfied with your work! You sent my boy to his death! His blood is upon your head!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Nora, holding out her hands, as if to ward off a blow. "It cannot be true that I caused his death! I loved him so I would have died for him!"

"You took a queer way of showing your love. But for your cursed pride and cruelty, he would have been here now, alive and well! How could you be so heartless?"

"When I thought it was only my money he wanted to pay his debts, what else could I do?"

"His debts? Do you know all his debts come to is four thousand dollars which I shall pay to-morrow? Do you think I would let my heir be inconvenienced for a petty sum like that? If Heaven spared him he would have had Tracy Park and ten thousand a year. Talk of a man with his prospects sacrificing himself for a few hundred dollars! Oh, I could laugh at your folly and presumption had they not cost me my son! May Heaven requite you for this work!"

Nora buried her face in her hands, and sunk on the floor, as if cowering under the curse of the old man; but Ada, who had come into the room, and heard the last part of Mr. Tracy's speech, now came forward to do battle for her sister.

"You have no right to speak in that way to Nora!" she exclaimed. "She is heart-broken as it is!"

"She deserves to be, for she has driven my son to destruction!"

"She has done nothing of the kind. You did far more toward it yourself. Why did you tell him you would not help him, and that he should either marry a fortune or emigrate? It is all your harsh treatment that drove him to it."

She paused, expecting a violent reply; but there was such cruel truth in her words that they struck the poor old man's heart; and, to her astonishment, he burst into tears.

"Yes, I helped to do it," he murmured. "My fine boy, that I was so proud of, snatched from me! God forgive me, I have sorely erred!"

"Dear Mr. Tracy, don't think things are so bad!" cried Ada, taking his hand, while the tears rolled down her own cheeks. "That telegram was most likely sent off in a hurry before any one knew the real facts, and, of course, everything looked more frightful just at first. He is a fine, strong young fellow, and

almost sure to get over it. And they want you down at once, and here we are letting the time slip, and doing nothing. I must help you to get off, and you must try to eat something."

"You are a good girl, after all," said Mr. Tracy, trying to smile as he pressed her hand. "Nora, my dear, come here."

She came to him and laid her hand on his shoulder, and they wept together.

"Won't you let me go with you? Oh, please do!" she asked, beseechingly. "I must go to him: I owe it to him, to atone for my conduct. I shall go mad if I am left here in uncertainty!"

"Of course you shall go, dear," said Ada, promptly. "I will settle it all with papa and mamma; but if you want to go by the mid-day train, you must both rouse yourselves and do something toward getting off. I can't eat your food for you, or quite put you into your traveling-clothes."

Ada's spirits and energy were invaluable at this crisis. She arranged everything; talked over her parents to consent to Nora going with Mr. Tracy; saw all their things packed and sent off to the station, and never rested until she and her father had seen them off safely in the train from Sea Beach.

To the two anxious travelers the time seemed interminable until they reached their journey's end.

The servant was in waiting with the carriage.

"How is he?" asked Gerald's father, shaking with anxiety.

"Doing bravely, sir. Faix he'll pull through it yet!"

At this welcome news, Mr. Tracy and Nora had great difficulty in preserving their outward composure. They could not trust themselves to speak, and drove in silence to the house where Gerald lay.

They were met by Mrs. Tracy, who was much surprised at seeing Nora; but when the latter told her story, and with bitter tears of reproaches accused herself of being the cause of all Gerald's misfortunes, her mother's heart melted, and kissing Nora, she said: "My poor girl, your pride and Gerald's was near costing you both your happiness; but I think he will be restored to you. Your presence, and the assurance of your love, will do him more good than all the doctors put together. Everything depends upon his having nothing to trouble him. He has had some hours' quiet sleep, and is decidedly better to-day. You shall see him soon, when his father has been in."

Loftus Tracy was shocked at the pale and haggard face he saw lying on the pillows.

"Well, Gerald, my boy, you have had a tough time of it," he said, trying to speak indifferently.

"Yes, I thought it was all over," replied the weak voice; "but I am disappointed."

"You must not talk like that, Gerald. You never were fool enough to mind my growlings? You ought to know I don't mean half I say. I always had a devil of a temper; but I stood to you in the end."

"I wish I could pay those bills," said Gerald, wearily.

"And what's to prevent you the very first day you feel inclined? You shall have a check for all you want. Hang it, my boy, don't think so much about it! No man should give way like that. It is most incomprehensible!"

As he finished his speech, the old man's tears were flowing far more quickly from his own eyes than were his son's, at which he affected to be so much astonished.

"You are very good, sir; I shall not abuse your kindness. When Nora knows her money was not everything to me, perhaps she will think better of me."

"I don't think it at all desirable that she should have a better opinion of you than she has! She might spoil you too much in the future. Only you are to be kept quiet. I could tell you a bit of news."

Gerald's eyes brightened.

"If you have any good news to tell me of her, don't keep me in suspense. The dead weight at my heart since I parted from her is far more painful than my injuries."

"Well, that shows what a fool you were to part from her; and as you ran away from her, she could do no less than follow you. Now, if you stir an inch, she shall go back by the next train."

Mr. Loftus Tracy was fast recovering his ordinary tone of command. Gerald sunk back with a resigned smile, his father left the room, and the next moment Nora was at his bedside. He held out his hand to her, and there was a long pause; Nora could not speak until she had mastered her emotion, so as to do so without excitement.

They seemed, however, to read all that was necessary in each other's eyes; for Nora bent over him and gently kissed his forehead.

He closed his eyes and lay back, as if soothed and contented with the knowledge that she was near. At last, he murmured, "Have you come to say that you forgive me, Nora?"

"I have come to ask you to marry me," she replied, looking frankly at him.

"My darling," said Gerald in a trembling voice, "you need not have done that. I would break a thousand silly oaths sooner than lose you now."

"Well, it comes to the same thing in the end; I have saved you from breaking your oath, and, when you are tired of me, you can always say I forced myself upon you and proposed for you. Now, here is your mother coming to turn me out. Try and sleep and eat, and get well, for my sake."

And Gerald, animated with a new hope, did all that he was requested to, and made such a rapid recovery that he surprised himself and every one else.

We need not describe his triumphal return to Aspell House with Nora; the intense satisfaction of the old people; the grinning welcome of the servants; Ada's irrepressible spirits and energy; and Tom Newman's rapt admiration of the same—for the wedding was to take place immediately, and Tom had been summoned to attend; Captain Wallis was best man, and Clara Roche one of the bridesmaids.

Mr. Tracy behaved most handsomely to the young people, for not only did he pay Gerald's debts and make a splendid present of jewels to Nora, but he allowed Gerald a liberal income, declaring that he would not allow it to be said that his son was living on his wife's money.

Ada and he became fast friends; and on her marriage, which was not very long after, he presented her with almost as handsome a present as her sister.

Mr. Lane somehow feels left out in the cold, and goes about a melancholy example of virtue unrewarded.

He was not even invited to Tom's wedding, and has been heard to say that he could feel neither friendship nor esteem for a man who had so weakly allowed himself to be wheedled by such an artful little flirt.

Captain Wallis and Clara Roche were married when their year's probation was over, and are models of a happy and domestic couple.

Mrs. Maurice Blake has been "cut" by the whole circle, and bitterly rues the attempt she made to blacken Gerald's character to Nora.

Her husband stays less at home than ever, and when she reproaches him for his frequent absences, he retorts by telling her that she has made his life in the neighborhood intolerable, since her slanderous tongue closed all the pleasant houses to him.

So the several couples of our story are settled down happily and well, and never try to outwit each other, remembering the trial of skill in which they all once engaged, in which they all suffered more or less, and which at one time threatened to wreck the future happiness of each actor concerned in the little plot.

THE END.